

**BOLL WEEVIL ERADICATION:  
STATUS AND FUTURE PLANS**  
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**Abstract**

The Boll Weevil Eradication Program continues to be an exciting and to some a controversial approach to solving one of the most serious pest problems in U.S. cotton. During 1995, good progress was made toward eradication in the recent expansion areas of the Southeast. Spot reinfestations in three areas, traced to the movement of infested equipment, serve as a reminder that post-eradication areas must be carefully protected. New program areas in Texas faced a variety of challenges and will continue to improve in 1996. The Southwest was weevil-free with a commitment to stay that way. Nationally, the program should expand into at least two additional areas in Texas, and possibly other areas, in 1996.

**Introduction**

I appreciate the opportunity to meet with you this morning, and to share some information about the boll weevil eradication program. For more than 30 years, the topic of weevil eradication has always generated emotional debate and strongly held opinions. There are thousands of growers who are convinced that eradication has at least strengthened, and may have even saved their industry in portions of the Southeast and Southwest. There are also a number of growers, mostly in south Texas, who are equally convinced that the process of eradication is driving them out of business. These divergent opinions make our work in the eradication program very interesting, and 1995 was no exception. Nationwide, we continue to make progress toward weevil eradication. In some areas, though, success comes much more slowly, and requires a great deal of courage, flexibility, and endurance. As I have thought about the endurance that is required, I have been encouraged by the following comments.

Thomas Edison has said, "Genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh noted that, "There are always 20 excellent reasons for doing nothing for every one reason for starting anything—especially if it has never been done before." Charles Spurgeon observed, "By perseverance, even the snail reached the Ark." And finally, James Conant said, "Behold the turtle: he makes progress only when he sticks his neck out." Some of you may believe that you have stuck your neck out by getting involved in boll weevil

eradication. I believe the benefits of eradication far outweigh any risks associated with the program, and that over time most growers will come to the same conclusion. During our time this morning, I want to give you an idea of what happened this past season, and where the program might be going in 1996.

**Program Update**

As we go into 1996, the weevil has been eliminated from significant acreage in the Southeast and Southwest. Nationwide, over 3.5 million acres are now weevil-free (Figure 1), in addition to about 4 million acres which have never been infested. This means that about 8 million acres, or half of this country's cotton, remains infested with the boll weevil. Within this infested area (Figure 2), active eradication programs are operating on about one million acres in portions of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas.

**Southeast**

In the Southeast program (Figure 3), significant progress was made this past year in reducing weevil populations. In fact, the program in north Alabama may be a year ahead of schedule in achieving eradication. In conducting eradication programs, it is always a challenge to live within budgets which are projected several years in advance. This is true again in the Southeast, where resources will be especially tight as we go into 1996.

**Texas**

Moving to the programs in Texas (Figure 4), we operated in two different areas, or zones, in 1995. We made some progress, but faced many challenges. After clearing legal hurdles, we encountered drought, flood, hail, tornadoes, and devastating problems with secondary pests. Growers had no effective method for controlling early-season aphids, and then beet armyworms. Yields in the Lower Rio Grande Valley were about one-eighth of what was expected, and some have laid the entire blame for this disaster on the weevil eradication program. We believe this is unfair. A variety of factors—many related to weather—combined to create a disastrous scenario. In an effort to further reduce the chance of a similar situation developing in 1996, program managers will make some adjustments based on requests made by growers, and EPA has promised a faster response to Section 18 requests. In spite of these improvements, a recent petition by growers in the Valley will result in a new referendum this month to decide if the program will continue in their zone. For nearly 20 years, we have maintained that eradication is a growers' program. Growers in the Rio Grande Valley voted for eradication a year ago. If they now vote to stop what they have started, that is their right, and that is probably one of the things that makes this country such an interesting place in which to live.

In related issues, we continue to encourage Mexican officials and growers in the State of Tamaulipas to begin an eradication program in areas adjacent to the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Such a program would greatly enhance the effectiveness of any program in south Texas.

Finally, with regard to Texas, growers in the High Plains zone of West Texas recently approved a referendum to expand and enhance their traditional fall suppression program. This program has, for over 30 years, protected about 3 million acres of uninfested cotton on the High Plains. This past fall, the High Plains program treated 5 times as many acres as in 1994. They plan to join the eradication effort in adjacent areas in the spring of 1998.

### **Southwest**

Moving to the far Southwest (Figure 5), the program has been very successful. During 1995, no boll weevils were trapped in California, Arizona, or nearby Mexicali. About 60 miles south of the Arizona border, 84 weevils were trapped near the Mexican town of Caborca. Program personnel treated 699 acres there to prevent economic damage to the cotton and to prevent weevil movement northward into eradicated areas. The active phase of the Southwest program is complete, but the important job of protecting those weevil-free areas will continue.

### **Reinfestations**

In that regard, I will shift back to the East for a moment and make a few comments regarding some reinfestations. Since the eradication program expanded through most of the Southeast in 1987, there has been a five-fold increase in cotton acreage in those 6 States (Figure 6). Over 3 million acres are now weevil-free in this portion of the country. This huge increase in acreage has created a critical need for equipment—new and used—to plant, cultivate, pick and gin the cotton.

Unfortunately, some of this used equipment was purchased outside the program areas, from areas of the Mid-South and Texas which still have the boll weevil. As this equipment was moved East, much of it was not inspected according to State quarantine regulations. As a result, some weevils were shipped back East along with the equipment. Reinfestations were detected in southern portions of Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia (Figure 7). A total of about 25,000 acres are involved. These areas are now under control, and any weevils surviving the winter should be eliminated this coming season. Before anyone concludes that we have lost the weevil war, we must remember that 99.2 percent of the acreage in the Southeast, or about 3 million acres on 85,000 fields, are still weevil-free.

These situations serve as important reminders of the constant vigilance that is required to protect the significant progress we have made in the Southeast. Like the ancient, walled cities of the past, we must have skilled and attentive

watchmen posted along the wall. And all growers, especially those just getting started in cotton, must understand the risk of reinfestation and share the commitment to regulate themselves and to keep the weevil from returning. As cotton acreage stabilizes in the East, this risk of artificial movement of boll weevils should diminish.

### **Expectations for 1996**

Next, I would like to give you some idea of where the eradication program is going in 1996. In addition to the areas which have been completed, and the areas where the program is currently active, the program is expected to expand into several new areas this coming season. The two new areas in Texas (Figure 8)—South Texas/ Wintergarden and the Central Rolling Plains—involve about 1.2 million acres and they are preparing to begin field operations by mid-summer. Initial treatments will start in the fall.

Two additional areas may start eradication programs this year if they can pass grower referenda. These areas involve the St. Lawrence portion of West Texas, and the Red River Valley of Louisiana and Texarkana.

Also, recent weevil detections in New Mexico are cause for concern. We are working with local growers and State officials to determine the extent of the infestation and an appropriate response for the coming season.

### **Summary**

Finally, it is obvious that 1995 was a difficult year for boll weevil eradication. In some ways we took two steps forward and one step back. We got whipped in a few areas. And some of us can now appreciate the words General Robert E. Lee wrote to Jefferson Davis after retreating from Gettysburg, when he said, "We must expect reverses, even defeats. They are sent to teach us wisdom and prudence, to call forth greater energies, and to prevent our falling into greater disasters." Having watched the program endure various highs and lows over the last 12 years, I am convinced that better days are coming. Some years the program's progress is very fast and very dramatic. At other times, progress is painfully slow. But as Samuel Johnson once said, "Great works are performed not by strength, but by perseverance." And regarding future direction, David Livingstone said, "I am prepared to go anywhere, provided it be forward."

Eradication remains a noble and worthwhile objective. And with a lot of good people doing a lot of hard work, weevil-free cotton is becoming a reality to more growers each year. As we go forward together with commitment, endurance, flexibility, patience, and especially God's grace, we will succeed.

**Boll Weevil Eradicated Areas – 1996**



Figure 1

B.G. 1-96

**Southwest Program Areas – 1996**

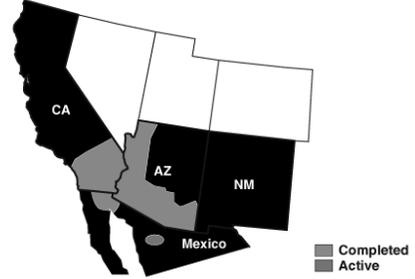


Figure 5

B.G. 1-96

**Eradication Program Areas – 1996**

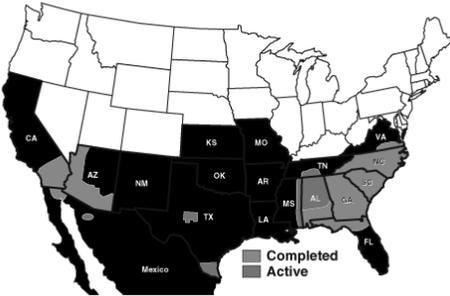
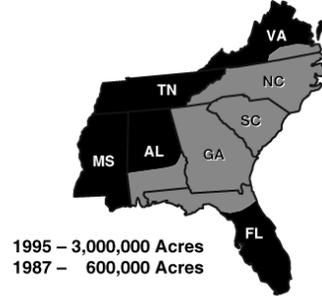


Figure 2

B.G. 1-96

**Southeast Eradicated Areas – 1996**



1995 – 3,000,000 Acres  
1987 – 600,000 Acres

Figure 6

B.G. 1-96

**Southeast Program Areas – 1996**



Figure 3

B.G. 1-96

**Southeast Eradicated Areas – 1996  
*Local Reinfestations***



Figure 7

B.G. 1-96

**Texas Program Active Areas – 1996**

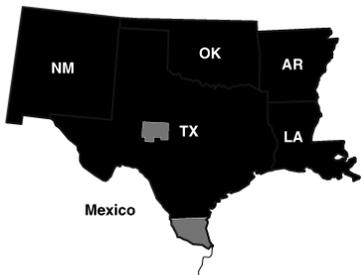


Figure 4

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**Expansion Areas – 1996**



Figure 8

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