

**ECONOMICS WORKSHOP:
COTTON PRODUCTION POSSIBILITIES**
Kenneth W. Paxton and Richard F. Kazmierczak, Jr.
**Department of Agricultural Economics
and Agribusiness**
Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station
LSU Agricultural center
Baton Rouge, LA

The workshop presented a summary of discussions held among research and extension service personnel in three major regions of the cotton belt. Summaries were presented by Dr. Steve Brown of the Georgia Coastal Plains Experiment Station, Dr. John Gannaway, Texas A&M Agricultural Experiment Station at Lubbock, and Dr. Mark Cochran, University of Arkansas. The following paragraphs summarize comments made at the workshop by the three presenters and audience participation.

In the southeast., the boll weevil eradication program has contributed to lower production costs for cotton and once again made this area extremely competitive in cotton production. The rapid expansion in cotton acreage has stressed the infrastructure serving the cotton industry. While the new transgenic varieties of cotton are attractive from a technical viewpoint, producers are not expected to adopt these varieties on a wholesale basis. The use of poultry litter in cotton production will likely increase as improvements are made in the handling , application, and nutrient content. An emerging pest problem for this area is the nematode. The dominant strain is difficult to control and could limit future cotton production in the area.

Primary problems discussed in the meeting with Texas A&M personnel included the need for simple management packages. Producers will adopt management packages that are simple to implement even if the underlying technology is very complex. Given the environment in which cotton is grown in this area, the need for new varieties with pest and weather tolerances is apparent. An associated problem is the need for resistance management as insects become more tolerant of currently used insecticides. Concern was also expressed about the growing burden of regulations and record keeping requirements. Finally, he group felt that marketing would become even more important in the future.

In the delta area, the primary concern was insect pests. Insects are a major limiting factor in cotton production in this area of the cotton belt. Further, insect control costs are substantially higher in this area than in other areas. This is especially true for the southern part of the region where insect control costs are extremely high. Other topics discussed included the potential for transgenic varieties in

this area. Even with the extreme insect pressure in this area, some reluctance was anticipated by producers in adopting these varieties. One reason cited was the need to control a wide spectrum of insects and eliminating one insect, whole helpful, may not reduce insect control costs sufficiently to justify adoption of the varieties on a large scale. There was also some discussion about the level of understanding about the cotton agro-ecosystem. The low level of understanding of the dynamics of this system contribute to the difficulties in managing a cotton crop. Finally, there was some discussion about the future role of consultants in cotton production. There was a general consensus that consultants would play a larger role in the future.

Pest management was a widespread concern across the cotton belt. It was noted that new chemistry is being made available and this coupled with the transgenic varieties could enhance pest control and extend product life. Uncertainties about the agroecosystem may be contributing to inefficient implementation of current production technology. Further, these uncertainties make it impossible to assess the long-term impact of changes of pest management.

A concern voiced across the belt was the limited ability of the research establishment to adequately address problems due to fiscal crises at the state and national levels. This has led to increased public/private partnerships to address problems in agriculture. One possible danger of this type of an arrangement is the tendency for research priorities to be set based more on short term profits rather than addressing the longer term problems of production stability and profitability. Another danger is the potential for increased incidence of post-experimental technology failure. This would expose producers to more than the historical risk associated with being an early adopter. Further, increased incidences of post-experimental failure would likely threaten the credibility of the agricultural research establishment.