

1999 YEAR IN REVIEW: THE SOUTHEAST

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The final yield will likely be the lowest in more than a dozen years, hovering close to the 500 lb/A mark. Reduced yields coupled with low prices lowered cash receipts to below \$450 million.

Abstract

The year began with most growers in a serious financial squeeze because of back-to-back poor crops and prices that have declined over 20 percent in the last couple of years. Survival depended on good yields, a miraculous rally in the market, and/or significant government intervention. In the end, production was poor, quality was poor, prices declined further, and government programs helped some.

The 1998-99 winter and early spring months were generally dry, and thus we entered the production cycle with limited subsoil moisture. Because of poor conditions in the seed-production regions of Arizona and Texas in 1998, seed supply and quality were limited. Shortages of certain proven cultivars and the increasing demand for transgenic technology resulted in significant commitment to varieties with little performance history in the state. Predictably, stand problems occurred with certain varieties due to marginal seed vigor.

As is normally the case, weather was the most critical factor on 1999 production. Most notably, a period of drought, high temperature, and high humidity from mid-July to mid-August devastated what had been an exceptional crop. Up until mid-July, moderate temperatures and occasional rains resulted in reasonable vegetative growth and excellent fruit set. Prior to the drought, cotton observers across the state indicated, "this is our best crop ever." The shift in weather to drought/heat was extreme. Severe stress during bloom and boll maturation significantly reduced yield and fiber (staple) length. Over 40 percent of the bales produced in Georgia in 1999 were discounted due to short staple.

This growing season further confused our understanding of variety performance. Weather extremes had a profound effect on productivity and resulted in questions and skepticism. In some intensely managed fields, serious fruit shed was observed. Uncertainty remains as to which varieties we should plant and which technology is profitable.

Insect pressure, particularly tobacco budworm and corn earworm, was low across the state. However, there were localized "hot spots." Pyrethroid resistance in tobacco budworm was suspected again in several areas of the state. Stink bugs were a serious pest in some areas, particularly in the southwestern portion of Georgia.