

HISTORICAL REGIONAL SHIFTS IN COTTON PLANTED ACRES IN THE U.S. 1960 – 1999

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Abstract

Cotton has long been a staple crop for many regions of the United States. Total area planted to cotton in 1999 is approximately 14.2 million acres. Cotton production can be broken down into four distinct growing regions in the United States. These regions are classified as: Southeast (Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, and Virginia); Mid-South (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Missouri); West (California, Arizona, and New Mexico); Southwest (Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma). Cotton has shifted among these regions over the years. This poster is a visual attempt to show those shifts and attempts to highlight some of the factors leading to these shifts. All references to acreage are given on a percent of planted acres basis. Acreage allotments and irrigation needs were limiting factors in the West during the 1960's. The regional breakdown in the 1960's for the Southeast, Mid-South, West, and Southwest was 16%, 29%, 9%, and 46% respectively. During the 1970's an increase in the planted acreage in the West occurred due to the abolishment of acreage allotments and new technologies in irrigation. The Southeast was also declining in percent planted acreage during the 1970's. This decrease can be attributed to higher production costs, quality issues, and yields. The 1970's also experienced low cotton prices as a result of the increased use of manmade fibers. Low prices and high production costs, gave producers in the Southeastern states incentives to switch from cotton production to alternative crops. The low cotton prices resulted in increased exports of cotton, which favored the western states due to shipping advantages and the consistent quality of their crop. As late as the 1970s and early 1980's high energy costs and inflation reduced producer incomes. These conditions gave an advantage to larger producers, which was typical of the West. A large portion of the smaller producers in the eastern half of the cotton belt switched to less management intensive crops. The regional breakdown for the 1970's for the Southeast, Mid-South, West, and Southwest was 9%, 29%, 13%, and 49% respectively. The first half of the 1980's was a continuation of the same trends

and factors which influenced cotton acreage in the 70s. The 1980's began a trend of cotton moving back into the eastern cotton belt states. Some influences, such as the boll weevil eradication program were beginning to take shape. The eradication program which began in North Carolina and Virginia in 1978, resulted in initial increased cost of production as producers sprayed intensively to eliminate the pest. Once the boll weevil was managed in these states, production costs declined. This allowed cotton to become a major profitable crop in the southeastern states. The regional breakdown for the 1980's for the Southeast, Mid-South, West, and Southwest was 7%, 25%, 15%, and 53% respectively. The 1990's saw major changes in cotton acreage in the Southern states. This is likely due to boll weevil eradication programs begun in the previous decade. The benefits of decreased production cost resulted in dramatic increases in acreage in southeastern states such as Georgia, North Carolina, Alabama, and South Carolina. Georgia was by the far the most dramatic increase in acreage going from 355,000 acres in 1990 to 1.5 million acres planted in 1999. Other influential factors were technological changes such as the use of transgenic cotton and farm policy changes resulting in virtual flexibility in planting decisions. The 1990's regional breakdown for the Southeast, Mid-South, West and Southwest was 17%, 10%, 29% and 44% respectively.