

**WEEDS OF COTTON:
Characterization and Control**

THE COTTON FOUNDATION

Reference Book Series

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The Foundation is pleased to publish **WEEDS OF COTTON: Characterization and Control**, the second in the series of cotton reference books. The first volume, **COTTON PHYSIOLOGY**, was published in 1986, and the third, **COTTON INSECTS AND MITES: Characterization and Management**, is planned for availability in 1993.

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WEEDS OF COTTON: Characterization and Control

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Number Two
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD	xv
PREFACE	xvii
CONTRIBUTORS	xxi
Chapter 1. Evaluation of Weed Control in Cotton	
<i>John R. Abernathy and Chester G. McWhorter</i>	1
Chapter 2. Trends in Cotton Production: History, Culture, Mechanization and Economics <i>James R. Supak, Carl G. Anderson & William D. Mayfield</i>	
Introduction	9
Origin of Cotton	10
Cotton in the New World	11
Cotton Culture and Production in the United States	12
Colonial Period	12
The 1775-1792 Period	13
1793–The Cotton Gin	15
The 1794-1860 Period	16
The 1862-1892 Period	22
The 1892-1935 Period	25
The 1936-1965 Period	29
The 1966-1986 Period	33
The Future of Cotton	38
Summary	39
Literature Cited	41
Chapter 3. Trends in Weed Control Methods	<i>Gale A. Buchanan</i>
Introduction	47
Methods of Weed Control	48
Cultural Methods	48
Mechanical Methods	51
Biological Methods	54
Radiant and UHF Electromagnetic Energy	56
Chemical Methods	58
Systems Approach	66
Expected Trends in Cotton Weed Control	67
Future Outlook of Cotton Weed Control	68
Literature Cited	69
Chapter 4. Interference of Weeds With Cotton <i>Harold D. Coble & John D. Byrd</i>	
Introduction	73

Competitive Effects of Weeds on Cotton	74
Weed Species Effects	74
Weed Density Effects	75
Weed Duration Effects	76
Competition for Resources	77
Environmental and Cultural Effects on Competition	79
Allelopathic Effects of Weeds on Cotton	80
Production Losses Associated With Weed Interference	80
Summary	81
Literature Cited	82

Chapter 5. Economics of Cotton Losses Caused by Weeds *J. M. Chandler & F. T. Cooke, Jr.*

Introduction	85
Economics of Current Cotton Weed Management Systems	86
Monetary Losses With Current Cotton Weed Management Systems	90
Influence of Deleterious Weeds on Monetary Returns Using Current Cotton Weed Management Systems	92
Summary	95
Tables	97
Literature Cited	115

Chapter 6. The Changing Weed Problem in Cotton *Don S. Murray, Laval M. Verhalen & Ronald J. Tyrl*

Introduction	117
Historical Perspective	119
Geographical Distribution	119
Early Crop Culture	121
Planting, Thinning and Nonchemical Weed Control	127
Mechanization	130
Adaptations of Weeds to Their Environment	132
Chemicals and Weed Shifts	134
Rotations	138
Herbicide Resistance Within Weed Species	140
Integrated Pest Management	141
Shifts by Geographic Regions	141
Prior to 1940	141
1940 Through 1969	144
1970 Through 1986	146
Present Situation and a Look Toward the Future	157
Literature Cited	162
Chapter Appendix	168
Weed Identification	168
Taxonomic Key to Weeds of Cotton	170

Photographs of Weeds in Cotton	188
Acknowledgement	188

Chapter 7. Herbicide Use Trends in

Cotton *Chester G. McWhorter & Charles T. Bryson*

Introduction	233
Use Trends in the 1950s	235
Herbicidal Oils	235
Preemergence Herbicides	237
Spot Treatments	239
Extent of Herbicide Use in the 1950s	240
Use Trends in the 1960s	241
Extent of Use of Preemergence Herbicides in the 1960s	242
Extent of Use of Postemergence Herbicides in the 1960s	243
Extent of Use of Spot-Treatment Herbicides in the 1960s	244
Use Trends in the 1970s	246
Herbicides for Preemergence Control in the 1970s	246
Herbicides for Postemergence Weed Control in the 1970s	247
Extent of Herbicide Use in the 1970s	247
Herbicide Use in the 1980s	250
Herbicides for Preemergence Control in the 1980s	250
Herbicides for Postemergence Control in the 1980s	251
Estimates on the Extent of Herbicide Use in Individual States in the 1980s	252
Extent of Use of Individual Herbicides in the 1980s	252
Extent of Herbicide Use in the 1980s Based on Time of Application	254
Supply and Cost of Herbicides	255
Custom Application of Herbicides	255
Future Herbicide Use	256
Literature Cited	258
Chapter Appendix (Tables 1-33)	261

Chapter 8. Herbicide Chemistry *Morris G. Merkle & Philip A. Banks*

Introduction	295
Families of Herbicides Used in Cotton	298
Dinitrophenols	298
Chlorinated Carboxylic Acids	300
Carbamates	300
Substituted Ureas	303
Arsenic Compounds	306
Symmetrical Triazines	308
Dinitroanilines	310
Chloroacetamides	313
Organic Phosphorus Compounds	314
Substituted Pyridazinones	315

Aryloxyphenoxy Aklanoic Acids	316
Cyclohexenones	318
Diphenylethers	318
Cinmethylin	319
Herbicides of the Future	320
Literature Cited	321

Chapter 9. Reduced-Tillage Systems *Charles T. Bryson & Paul E. Keeley*

Introduction	323
History of Tillage in Cotton	324
Advantages and Disadvantages of Reduced- and No-Tillage	
Cotton Production	327
Reduced-Tillage/Cropping Systems for Cotton Production	332
Most Troublesome Weeds	334
Weed Control	337
Summary	341
Acknowledgements	341
Literature Cited	342
Chapter Appendix (Tables 1-16)	347

Chapter 10. Effect of Soil Properties and Processes on Herbicide Performance and Persistence *William C. Koskinen & Thomas B. Moorman*

Introduction	365
Environmental Factors Affecting Herbicides in Cotton Soils	366
Climate	366
Soil	367
Soil Processes Affecting Herbicide Activity in Soil	368
Herbicide Retention Processes	368
Transformation Processes	373
Herbicide Transport Processes	379
Herbicide Persistence and Activity in Soils	386
Interactions of Soil Factors/Processes and Cultural Practices and	
Herbicide Activity	391
Tillage Operations	391
Application Methods	392
Summary	393
Literature Cited	395

Chapter 11. Modes of Action of Herbicides Used in Cotton *Stephen O. Duke*

Introduction	403
Why Understand Mode of Action?	403
Levels of Mode of Action	404
Modes of Action of Herbicide Classes	405

Arsenicals	405
Aryloxyphenoxy Aklanoic Acids	407
Chlorinated Aliphatic Acids	409
Chloroacetamides	410
Cineole Derivatives	411
Cyclohexanediones	411
DCPA	412
Dinitroanilines	413
Glyphosate	414
Isoxazolidinones	417
<i>p</i> -Nitrosubstituted Diphenyl Ethers	418
Pyridazinones	421
Sulfonylureas	421
<i>s</i> -Triazines	422
Ureas	426
Biotechnology and Future Directions	427
Herbicide Design	427
Engineering Herbicide Resistance Into Cotton	427
Summary	429
Acknowledgements	430
Literature Cited	431

Chapter 12. Herbicide Application

Technology William L. Barrentine, Charles E. Snipes & Ralph S. Baker

Introduction	439
Terms and Definitions	440
Application Technology Evolution	441
Early Developments	441
Soil Incorporation	442
Aerial Application	442
Herbicide Formulations and Additives	443
Specialized Application Techniques	444
Application Methodology	446
Sprays	447
Granules	470
Contact	474
Chemigation	475
Soil Incorporation	478
Cotton Belt Application Techniques	483
Southeast	484
Mid-South	488
Southwest	489
West	490
Cotton Belt	491
Future Needs	492

Summary	495
Acknowledgements	496
Literature Cited	497
Chapter Appendix	501
Calibration of Low-Pressure Hydraulic Sprayers	501
128th Method	501
Formula Methods	506

Chapter 13. Effect of Herbicides on Growth of Cotton and Associated

Crops *Allen F. Wiese, Rodney W. Bovey & E. Ford Eastin*

Introduction	515
Effect of Cotton Herbicides on Cotton Growth and Yield	516
Dinitroanilines (Trifluralin, Pendimethalin and Oryzalin)	517
<i>s</i> -Triazines (Prometryn and Cyanazine)	517
Ureas (Diuron, Fluometuron and Linuron)	519
Arsenicals (MSMA and DSMA)	519
Pyridazinones (Norflurazon)	519
Chloroacetamides (Alachlor and Metolachlor)	519
Glyphosate	520
Paraquat	520
Cyclohexenones (Phenoxaprop and Sethoxydim) and Aryloxyphenoxy Alkanolic Acids (Fluazifop-p)	520
Effect on Cotton of Herbicide Carryover From Other Crops	521
Sulfonylureas (Chlorimuron, Chlorsulfuron and Metsulfuron)	522
Imidazolinone (Imazaquin)	523
<i>s</i> -Triazines (Atrazine, Simazine and Propazine)	523
Benzoic and Phenoxyacetic Acid (Dicamba, 2,4-D)	523
Fomesafen	524
Effect of Spray Drift on Cotton	524
Phenoxys and Other Hormone-Like Herbicides	524
Physiological Effects of 2,4-D and Picloram	526
Rice Herbicides	527
Soybean Herbicides	528
Effect of Cotton Herbicides on Other Crops	528
Trifluralin and Pendimethalin	528
Fluometuron	529
Norflurazon	529
Prometryn and Metolachlor	530
Tolerance of Cotton Cultivars to Herbicides	530
Glyphosate	530
2,4-D	530
Propazine and Atrazine	531
Trifluralin	531
Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering	531
Plant Cell and Tissue Culture	532

Recombinant DNA Technology	533
Practical Applications of Biotechnology	533
Summary	534
Literature Cited	544

Chapter 14. Teamwork in the Development of Weed Management Programs for Cotton Farmers *Harold M. Kempen & Billy J. Gossett*

Introduction	549
Historical Aspects	549
Recent Cooperative Efforts	549
Who Does Research	551
The Experiment Station Team	553
Extension's Role in Weed Management Programs	558
How Industry Works With Public Agencies	560
The Consultants Enter the Scene	563
The Capability of the Farmer	567
Regulatory Contributions	570
Summary	571
Literature Cited	572
Chapter Appendix	575
Useful Weed Management Publications	575
Other Sources of Information	577

Chapter 15. What is in the Future? *Will D. Carpenter & Claude W. Derting*

Introduction	579
Biotechnology	580
Conventional Screening Process	581
Biotechnology Process	581
New Issues and Considerations	582
Biological Control	584
Herbicide Resistance and Enhanced Degradation	586
Computer Technology and Weed Control	588
Computer-Assisted Farm Management	588
Computer-Assisted Growth Simulation Models	590
Computer-Assisted Weed Maps	591
Cotton Monoculture	592
Irrigation	593
New Application Technology	593
New Cultural Practices	595
Environmental and Regulatory Issues	596
Introduction	596
Ground and Surface Water	596
Analytical Sensitivity	597
The Endangered Species Act	598

Regulatory Direction	599
Registration and Reregistration Costs	600
Field-Use Restrictions	600
Soil Erosion Control	600
Irrigation	601
Summary	601
Herbicide Industry Changes	601
Fewer and Bigger	601
Licensing and Acquisitions	602
Marketing	602
Patent and Data Protection	602
Future Needs	603
Predictions	604
Literature Cited	604
WEED INDEX	609
HERBICIDE INDEX	615
SUBJECT INDEX	621

FOREWORD

Major weeds are highly competitive and may deprive crops, and even other weeds, of nutrients, water, light and space. In the case of cotton, uncontrolled weeds will impact both yield and quality adversely. Weeds can interfere with planting, efficient application of pesticides and irrigation water, boll opening and drying and harvesting. Weeds also may harbor or act as alternate hosts for cotton insect and disease pests. In addition, some weeds produce and release inhibiting substances that adversely affect neighboring crop and weed plants.

Today, cotton is grown in an environment shared by some 30,000 or so species of weeds. Fortunately, in a given field or season, the number of troublesome species usually is limited to ten or less.

Weed control was not looked upon as a separate science until after the introduction of selective herbicides in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Prior to that time, weed research to develop new control methods was very limited and spread among several scientific disciplines.

Cotton was one of the first major crops for which producers recognized the need for, and importance of expanded research—both applied and basic—to develop new weed control technology. They recognized that one of the first needs was to have scientists trained in weed science and interested in using that training to develop the needed technology for cotton. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the Foundation for Cotton Research and Education (now The Cotton Foundation) funded several graduate assistantships in weed science. Two of the early recipients were Dr. John T. Holstun and Dr. Chester G. McWhorter. Dr. Holstun is deceased, but he made tremendous contributions during his shortened career.

Dr. McWhorter, a co-editor of this cotton reference book, still is making major contributions. He was president of the Weed Science Society of America 1983 and editor of the Society's 1987 monograph entitled *Methods of Herbicide Application*. Dr. McWhorter was recognized in 1989 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as recipient of the ARS Distinguished Scientist of the Year Award.

The cotton industry played a significant role in early weed research in several other ways. During the 1960s, several state and federal pioneering weed research programs were funded in part by the Cotton Producers Institute, the forerunner to Cotton Incorporated. The cotton industry also played a major role in the successful efforts in the 1960s that provided federal funds to significantly increase weed research by both land grant institutions and USDA.

The cotton industry also played a role with regard to major contributions by the other co-editor of this book, Dr. John R. Abernathy. However, the relationship was more indirect. A short prelude is in order.

The High Plains of Texas often is referred to as the "biggest cotton field in the world." The 25 counties around Lubbock constitute the largest contiguous area of cotton production in the world.

A grant from the Cotton Producers Institute to Texas A&M University in the

1960s made it possible to establish the first full time weed research program for cotton in the Texas High Plains. After several years of productive research, the first scientist in that position moved on to university administrative work at College Station. Dr. Abernathy filled that position in 1973 and has made significant contributions to cotton weed management technology. In 1985, he became resident director of research at the Texas A&M Research and Extension Center at Lubbock. He also served as president of the Weed Science Society of America in 1991.

It is very appropriate that Drs. McWhorter and Abernathy served as co-editors of this book, **WEEDS OF COTTON: Characterization and Control**.

The National Cotton Council is pleased to have played a significant role in initiating The Cotton Foundation Reference Book Series. The first book in the series, *COTTON PHYSIOLOGY*, recently was reprinted for the second time. The three printings attest to the widespread interest in reference books on cotton. We believe the interest in **WEEDS OF COTTON: Characterization and Control**, the second in the series of books, will be as great.

As with the first book, the usefulness of **WEEDS OF COTTON: Characterization and Control** as a reference book will go beyond the traditional researcher, teacher and student. Private agricultural consultants and agricultural chemical industry representatives will find it to be a valuable source of information. Modern-day cotton producers also will find this book to be both interesting and useful. They are the ones who are not satisfied with just having technology to use. They want to know how it works and why. This helps them to refine and adapt new technology to their own specific conditions and situations. Innovative producers want to relate technology to economic returns and environmental concerns.

The National Cotton Council and The Cotton Foundation are indebted to the editors, Dr. Chester G. McWhorter and Dr. John R. Abernathy, and to the other 28 scientists who served as authors of the 15 chapters. These scientists have dedicated considerable time and effort in making this a book everyone can be proud of. A listing of all the contributors is shown on pages xxi through xxv.

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PREFACE

Weeds are familiar plants to most people; however, authorities in many disciplines have struggled for decades to develop an all-encompassing definition for these plants. Weed definition has never been a problem for the cotton farmer who classifies any plant in the field other than cotton as being a weed. From the time that cotton became a major crop in the United States in the late 1700s, the removal of weeds by hand represented more than 50 percent of the labor input required for production of the crop. Even as late as 1950 it was acknowledged that 50 to 60 percent of the total labor requirement in cotton production was for hand hoeing. The first attempts to use herbicides in the 1950s and early 60s were primarily to reduce the need for the large amounts of hand labor.

When farmers from other regions of the United States first visit the Cotton Belt, they observe that cotton producers may be overzealous in their attempt to control weeds as they appear to obtain near perfect weed control. Cotton yields are reduced from weed competition, especially competition during the first six weeks of the growing season, but producers are also concerned about losses in cotton lint quality because of weeds at harvest. The presence of weeds at harvest, especially grasses, will stain cotton lint and will cause trash from weeds to be mixed in lint, thus greatly reducing its value. This concern for high lint quality may cause cotton producers to seek a higher level of weed control than would be expected in other agronomic crops.

Until the mid 1900s the only form of weed control, other than hand hoeing, was with animal-drawn cultivators. It was not unusual for cotton to be cultivated weekly for the first 10 to 12 weeks of the growing season. Producers began shifting to tractor-mounted cultivators in the late 1930s and this shift was completed in the late 1940s when nearly all cultivation was with tractor-mounted cultivators. During this evolutionary period, producers made use of other mechanical means of control that included flame cultivators, rotary weeders, cross-cultivation and mechanical choppers. They also made extensive use of geese, especially to control grass species. These practices often helped reduce costs but even so, large quantities of hand labor still were needed to control weeds within the cotton drill.

Farmers were anxious to reduce the need for hand labor by using herbicides when they first were introduced in the early 1950s. Early cotton injury experiences caused many producers to be very cautious in their use of herbicides. It was not until the early 1960s that the use of herbicides showed rapid and consistent growth. Many highly selective herbicides were developed and marketed in the 1960s. By the mid 1970s, most of the cotton produced in the United States involved the use of one or more herbicides.

As the acreage treated with herbicides increased in the 1960s and 70s, ecological shifts occurred whereby weeds, such as prickly sida, that had been almost nonexistent in cotton fields became major weed problems. Perennials, such as

purple and yellow nutsedge, silverleaf nightshade and perennial vines, became much more troublesome because they did not have to compete with other weeds. These ecological shifts caused many researchers to devote more effort toward developing control technology for weeds that were not troublesome in the 1950s and also to develop predictive capability as to what new weeds may be troublesome in the future. Studies of this type are an important part of many research efforts in the United States at present. Accurate taxonomic identification of weeds also became more important.

Cotton farmers have been unique, as compared to the producers of other crops, in their desire to use innovative weed control technology. This was demonstrated not only by the early use of geese, flame cultivation, cross-cultivation and post-emergence-applied herbicidal naphtha, but also by their early widespread use of herbicides applied in postemergence-directed sprays. Cotton producers adopted postemergence-directed application first and continue widespread use of this practice today.

Many highly selective herbicides have been introduced and marketed during the last three decades, but producers still do not have a herbicide for control of broadleaf weeds that can be applied as a broadcast over-the-top-spray as in other crops. This has forced cotton producers to continue to use postemergence-directed sprays to control broadleaf weeds that escape preemergence treatment. So many efficient herbicides were introduced in the 1960s that this decade has been referred to as the "golden decade" and the "fabulous 60s". At that time the "state-of-the-art" of weed control in cotton with herbicides was probably at a much more advanced stage than in other crops. Unfortunately, the introduction of new, highly selective herbicides for use in cotton decreased while those that became available for use in soybeans, corn and other crops increased dramatically. As a result, many of the herbicides introduced in the 1960s, such as trifluralin, fluometuron, DSMA/MSMA, linuron and paraquat, have continued to be valuable in cotton production into the 1990s.

In the 1950s and the 1960s, much of the research related to weed science in cotton production was devoted to the evaluation of new herbicides and in the integration of these into existing weed control programs. The expanded use of herbicides in cotton production in the 1960s and 70s led to expanded research on efficient application technology, the exact nature of weed interference, economic losses caused by different weeds, and on the residual effect caused by the use of herbicides. Expanded research also has been seen on the more basic aspects, such as the relationship of herbicide chemistry to mode of action and herbicide-soil-groundwater relationships as well as the more applied aspects, such as developing teamwork in weed management. These and other aspects are covered in this monograph and it is our intent that this publication provide a record on the state-of-the-art weed control technology in cotton to this point in history.

We express our appreciation to the many authors who contributed their time to make this publication possible. Hopefully, this book will not only serve as a background reference in the area of weed science in cotton, but it may also serve as the genesis for new ideas that lead to better weed management in this very important crop.

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