

# Field Check

October 1999

A project of the Cotton Pest Management Alliance

University of California-Cooperative Extension and California Cotton Growers Association participating

## Calendar

### Nov. 9

Annual Insect Review Conference  
9 a.m.,  
Visalia Convention Center,  
Calif. Cotton Growers Association:

(559) 252-0684

### Dec. 6-7

University of California/Cotton Workgroup/Cotton Inc. state support committee meeting,  
Kearney Ag Center,  
Bob Hutmacher:  
(661) 746-8020.

## Making the best of a late situation

With many Pima fields behind schedule, growers may be pushed into some hard choices about their harvest timing.

Faced with the unwanted risk of a late harvest and negative impacts on yield and quality, what should a Pima grower do?

For starters, says Tulare County farm advisor Steve Wright, don't panic. "It's not abnormal to harvest Pima in mid-November," he says.

Secondly, Wright suggests that there might be a place for using Roundup as a "pre-defoliation move" when Pima plants reach six to eight nodes above cracked boll (NACB). "Roundup helps control regrowth in those fields that are still vegetative," he says. "Under those conditions, it would be a good choice to stop terminal growth."

Another consideration may be to start defoliation at five NACB, instead of the standard three. "Ginstar would be a good choice as your first defoliation application," says Wright, who leans toward two defoliant applications for Pima. "It helps set up the plant for further defoliation."

Finally, he says, growers need to select the absolute latest date they're willing to harvest and count back 21 days from there to begin defoliation. "You can hope for dry weather, but you really have no choice," Wright says. "If we get into bad weather, you're going to have to take what you've got, regardless of how many open bolls you have." □

## Keep tabs on any verticillium wilt for next year's variety decisions

Foliar symptoms of verticillium wilt have been showing up in both Acala and California Upland fields since about mid-July, although signs of the disease appeared mostly after the crop had been made.

In most fields, little impact on yields is expected since foliar damage was limited until late season. If you haven't yet defoliated, look for wilt symptoms, such as the characteristic blotchy yellow areas on leaves. These areas become surrounded by brown, necrotic areas as the damage worsens.

You may want to take note for next year on which fields are showing verticillium wilt. Consider looking at any available data from the seed companies on expected verticillium resistance of California Uplands varieties when you make your variety selections next year. □



Cotton picking should kick into full gear by Oct. 11. The Pima harvest will be late this year.

## Season's crop yields high hopes

September's warm weather was just what the doctor ordered for Valley cotton fields, and hopes are high that area growers will finally see a decent crop.

Acalas and California Uplands particularly have benefited from the added heat units.

The warm days have aided defoliation, which is underway across the Valley. Harvesting is expected to kick into full gear around Oct. 11.

"Yields range from moderate to very good," says Bob Hutmacher, statewide cotton specialist with the University of California-Cooperative Extension. Hutmacher attributes the yield potential to the season's relatively low insect pressure and the cooler temperatures that helped plants avoid heat stress.

Don Nuckols of California Delinting Company sees the potential for "tremendous yields." "It's a little premature but I think we could possibly see some 3-plus bales," he says.

"It's been so long since we've seen a good crop, I don't know if we even remember what one looks like," says Mike Hooper, manager of Farmer Cooperative Gin near Buttonwillow.

Nevertheless, growers there are hoping for better-than-average production. Some are looking for yields to reach between 2½ and 3 bales per acre.

Further north, at Westside Farmers Cooperative Gin, manager Fred Cooks thinks it's possible growers may make their old average of 2.8 bales per acre.

Pima fields managed for full-season production remain the greatest concern. In many cases, those fields are 1-2 weeks late. □

# Avoid rough prep Pima

Receiving a "rough preparation" grade on your Pima cotton could cost you significantly this year.

Although rough prep Pima is eligible for the 1999-00 government loan, USDA will discount it by 12 cents a pound. Last year, Pima classed rough prep wasn't even eligible for the government loan.

"It's extremely important that cotton producers and ginners do everything they possibly can to pick, store and gin their cotton as best they can to avoid that 12-cent discount," says Jerry Ward, area director of USDA's Visalia Cotton Classing office.

Ward says that while last year's Pima crop produced 85 percent Grade 3 or better, there was a downside. Eleven percent of the Valley's Pima earned a rough prep grade.

Rough prep cotton, a classing reduction listed under "extraneous matter," lacks a smooth appearance. Prep cotton is determined visually and is not measured by HVI. Its fibers are often matted and tangled. That's believed to create problems in the spinning process, which is why rough prep Pima is discounted.

Causes of rough prep—and its close cousin, spindle twist—can generate a spirited discussion. Does it occur in the field? At the gin? Or is the classing too tough? Whatever the case, USDA has tagged it for a significant discount.

Avoid the rough prep call by following these tips:

- **Pick as dry as possible.**

"Some growers pick their Pima when the cotton's moisture content is 16 or 18 percent," says Ward. "Anything above 10 percent is too high for picking Pima." Dew, rain or heavy fog all contribute to moisture content.

- **Slow down your pickers.**

"There's a growing temptation, with this tough market, to pick



**Pima picked too wet can suffer fiber damage in the module. It can sustain further damage when run through the gin's module feeder.**

Pima at full speed," says Mike Hooper, manager of Farmers Cooperative Gin, one of the largest Pima processors in the SJV. "In general, it would be better to slow pickers down to half speed or at least a third."

Also, keep picker spindles clean and avoid using too much water. Monitor cotton in the basket to avoid roping problems.

- **Consider your modules.**

Seed cotton with excessive moisture content will suffer further damage once it's in module form. "Seed cotton goes through a 'heat' or combustion that can damage the fiber and make it more difficult to get through the gin," Ward says.

At the same time, think twice about the size of your modules. "To reduce hauling expenses, growers are often asked to make bigger, heavier modules," says Hooper. "But with Pima especially, a dense module runs into problems at the dispersing cylinders of the module feeder." In that case, the cotton is exposed to the cylinder teeth longer, and that can lead to higher prep. Hooper recommends holding Pima module weights at 17,000 to 20,000 pounds.

- **Take care with ginning.**

Gins using insufficient Btu (or heat units) when ginning Pima will not produce enough heat to adequately dry down the cotton,

says Ward. The Pima then has to be ginned longer, increasing the chances of prep.

Heat isn't a problem with Pima. "Pima gins better at higher temperatures," says Hooper.

High-velocity air in the gin can also lead to prep, he adds. □

## Silverleaf whitefly: A dodged bullet

A cooler cotton-growing season has resulted in overall, relatively low whitefly populations in 1999.

"The numbers of whiteflies have increased dramatically in a few cotton fields in the Mettler-Wheeler Ridge area of Kern County late in the season," Nick Toscano, Extension entomologist with the University of California-Riverside said Sept. 30.

"However, these whitefly populations will not impact cotton quality if defoliation has commenced or is completed soon."

Foliage desiccation will kill the immature whiteflies.

"Our research showed the defoliant DEF by itself can be a good whitefly insecticide," Toscano added. □

## Helpful Web sites

<http://ipmwww.ncsu.edu/cottonpickin>  
Information on cotton and cotton production, supported by Cotton Inc., the Center for IPM and USDA/CSREES.

[www.ucce.tulare.ca.us/pub/rm98.htm](http://www.ucce.tulare.ca.us/pub/rm98.htm)  
For current information on resistance management guidelines.

## FieldCheck

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