

Extension Specialist: Rainfall Improves Soil Conditions in Texas Cotton Fields

Tuesday, May 3, 2016 By Adam Russell, AgriLife TODAY

Most cotton fields in southern and eastern portions of the state are faring well and recent rains have improved soil moisture indexes in portions of West Texas and the Panhandle in time for planting, said Dr. Gaylon Morgan, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service cotton specialist, College Station.

Morgan said he expects cotton acreage to be slightly lower than 2014, but nearly double 2015 acres planted in South and East Texas. Spring 2015 was extremely wet and prevented much of the Rio Grande Valley and Coastal Bend from being planted that year.

"The 2016 crop has had its challenges with excessive rain, but nothing compared to the prolonged wet weather observed in 2015," he said.

The bulk of Texas' cotton planting in West Texas and the Rolling Plains will get underway shortly with adequate soil moisture across most regions. Rain events in West Texas and the Rolling Plains over the previous weeks improved the moisture index in time for planting, but Morgan said another timely rain in mid-to-late May would help establish good cotton stands.

On the other hand, recent rains in the northern and southern blacklands have been detrimental to emerging cotton crops. Morgan said some crop land there would need replanting while others have not been planted due to inaccessible fields. The planting window in those areas is around May 31, he said.

"We are hoping to dry out enough to bring the cotton acres up to about 140,000 for the Blacklands region," he said.

Based on the Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation's program estimates, cotton producers in the South and East Texas zones will plant around 800,000 acres this year. Approximately 479,000 acres of cotton was planted in the South and East Texas zones during 2015, down from approximately 889,682 acres in 2014.

By comparison, producers in West Texas planted 4.6 million acres of cotton in 2015 and are expected to be comparable for 2016, with some regions increasing slightly and other regions dropping slightly depending on concerns for input costs, sugarcane aphid and irrigation capacity.

Danielle Sekula-Ortiz, AgriLife Extension integrated pest management agent in Weslaco, said cotton planted in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, where cotton typically is planted earliest, is up and squaring nicely, with some older fields showing blooms.

Sekula-Ortiz said the crops appear to be maturing quickly because of warm temperatures and are far ahead of 2015, when plantings were delayed by rains. She said producers were seeing an increase in aphid and flea hopper populations and have begun treating fields to address potential pest problems.

"Everything is looking really good," she said. "A good rain in the next two weeks would be perfect."

High Plains Water District Releases Annual Water Level Measurements

Friday, April 29, 2016 From the HPWD

Annual water level measurements indicate an average increase of +0.37 of a foot in the groundwater levels of the Ogallala Aquifer within the 16-county High Plains Underground Water Conservation District (HPWD) service area from 2015 to 2016.

Above-average rainfall, which fell in a timely manner, helped increase groundwater levels during 2015-2016. This compares to the average change of - 0.56 of a foot recorded in 2014-2015.

The 10-year district average change (2006-2016) is -9.29 feet while the five-year district average change (2011-2016) is -5.94 feet.

Water level measurements are made from December to March each year in 1,400 privately-owned water wells completed into the Ogallala/Edwards-Trinity (High Plains) Aquifer.

In addition, the district made water level measurements in 24 wells as part of the newly-established Dockum Aquifer observation well network.

"We encourage area residents to visit the interactive web map at map.hpwd.org to view charts of water levels as well as the saturated thickness for each of the observation wells in our network. The online tools provided on the district's website can help people understand the variability in saturated thickness and groundwater levels within the district's 16-county service area," said HPWD General Manager Jason Coleman.

Results of the 2016 HPWD water level measurements are also presented in a 80 page report available for online viewing/downloading at <http://www.hpwd.org/reports/>.

A limited number of printed copies are available by contacting the HPWD office at (806) 762-0181.

Created in 1951 by local residents and the Texas Legislature, the High Plains Underground Water Conservation District is charged with the responsibility of conserving, preserving, protecting, and preventing the waste of groundwater within its 16-county service area. It celebrates its 65th Anniversary in 2016. For more information, visit <http://www.hpwd.org>.

The EPA has extended the comment period on the use of dicamba herbicide in dicamba-tolerant cotton and soybeans to May 31.

To submit your comment about this new technology, visit <https://www.regulations.gov/#!submitComment;D=EPA-HQ-OPP-2016-0187-0001>