

Field Notes:

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The harvest is a special time.

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As the month of September passed and October begins we can look back on a year that has proven to be unique as all of them are. Weather has played a primary role in driving everything that has been attempted and accomplished. The early period of almost daily rainfall produced both positive and negative effects on the crop, modifying plans for many growers.

The preparation of fields for planting was greatly influenced by weather. In some instances fields intended for planting either corn or soybeans were not planted but allowed to rest for the year. The impact of this will have effects on the supply of these commodities although it seems that yields have now offset part of the anticipated reduction.

Cotton, which was already planned for expansion was planted on more acres statewide with quite a few new producers either planting it for the first time or returning to it after years of grain or other enterprises. There was also a gain in the planting of peanuts over the previous year although some fields intended for this crop as were not successfully established due to weather.

At times, short term drought arrived but the spring recharge of soil moisture sustained most fields through these times. Those who could irrigate did so to a limited degree compared to most years. Reduced tillage and no-till fields, especially those following winter cover were supplied well with moisture throughout the season.

Combines have now been gathering the grain crops for several weeks and we have been reminded of the great importance of soil management practices as yields have reflected both the best and worst of soils and methods. There have been instances where corn yields from dryland fields have equaled those commonly seen under irrigation, while at the same time some of the best fields have exhibited yield reduction due to drainage problems during the early stages of the crop.

As always, the end results have been the product of a system combining all the factors of soil and crop management. These include rotation program and field history, tillage practice, soil pH and overall nutrient availability, drainage, and the timely availability of water. The secondary issues of variety selection, row spacing, plant population, disease and pest management, and others came into the mix influenced by all the other factors.

Cotton has again proven itself the complex plant we know it to be, suffering the effects of weather or succumbing to its effects on a scale of severity that is difficult to understand or anticipate. As a whole, the cotton crop has amazed us again with its ability to deal with adversity and remind us why it has been the one we return to through the years. And again, we have seen its capability to produce as well or better in the highly variable soil conditions and production practices of the Hills as compared with the Delta where it has seemed to struggle this season.

Corn harvesting is essentially complete. The gathering of soybeans and peanuts are well past the halfway point. The cotton harvest is moving steadily in the Delta while in the Hills most of the crop is being defoliated and waiting for bolls to finish opening. It appears that the Hill crop may be very good again this year, as suggested by the fields I have seen so far.

Cotton harvesting now ranges from a few remaining two row, but mostly four, and six row basket machines to the new generation of baling machines that are revolutionizing the production of cotton in more ways than just the harvest. It's a far cry from my early days of hand picking cotton with my family in Attala County.

Our neighbors on both east and west sides have experienced the force of hurricanes but so far most of our state has been spared. Our thoughts and prayers should be with those areas as we enjoy a favorable harvest season.

Thanks for your time.