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Planning cotton defoliation and harvest

Cotton harvest is approaching fast, and proper timing for defoliant and harvest aid applications is important to maximize yield and lint quality. Variable temperatures and rain during this season have increased the variability for crops reaching maturity and in many cases forced late planting increasing the chances for problems due to frost damage this fall. Therefore carefully sampling fields to determine if the lint is fully formed is critical. As rule of thumb defoliation is appropriate when 60%–75% of the bolls are open. Another method to determine cotton maturity is the number of “nodes above cracked bolls” (shortened to NACB). Research has shown that cotton with four nodes above the highest cracked boll can be defoliated without significant losses in weight or quality. If NACB counts average five or more, defoliant applications should be delayed.

Estimating the number of mature, open bolls in the field is helpful in scheduling the defoliant and boll opener. Under good growing conditions, ten mature bolls per foot of row produce a bale of cotton per acre. More bolls are needed if they are higher on the plant; fewer bolls are needed if they are lower on the plant. Counts should include (1) open bolls, including cracked bolls; (2) green bolls that are mature and string out when cut with a knife; and (3) immature bolls that are harvestable or will mature while conditions are favorable. In order to make sure that unopened bolls are harvestable you can try to dent the boll by squeezing it in your hand or try to cut it with a knife. Mature bolls are hard to dent and cut. Also, when the boll is sliced lint strings will be exposed and seeds will show a yellow to tan color.

Weather conditions can influence harvest-aid and defoliant activity. All the harvest-aid chemicals have a significant reduction in activity at 60°F–65°F, so they must be applied during periods of time in which temperatures are above this range, and there is enough soil moisture because drought can also reduce their action.

For specific recommendations on products and rates of defoliation and harvest-aid chemicals see EDIS-SS-AGR-181.
Growing grass for grazing, hay, or both

A question that is often asked by those that are new to ranching is can I hay the pastures that I use for grazing?

Grass can be grown for grazing and haying —but is it profitable to grow hay in small farms?

Production of hay requires specialized equipment (that includes minimum of tractor, mower, rake, hay baler). In most cases when you are a small farm operation, it is more economical to contract the hay production or buying hay than producing it yourself because of the costs involved in initial equipment purchase and the maintenance costs involved.

Medium to large ranches usually have hay equipment, and is customary for many of these operations to combine grazing and hay production. Some large ranchers in Florida prefer to grow grass for hay in the summer months to take advantage of the summer growing conditions, but some switch to grazing and supplemental feeding of large stocks of cattle during the winter months.

Some of the advantages to graze a hay field include:

a) Build up organic matter and recycle nutrients back into the fields from livestock manure and urine.
b) Weed control, and/or clear out of fence line

Other intensive grazing management operations, opt to haying to keep up with the grass growth between grazing cycles. For example, these operations would rotate livestock very frequently, and grass growth may exceed the ability of the animals to graze it down.

Some disadvantages include:

a) Hoof damage of hay fields where wet conditions prevail.
b) Weed contamination of field through livestock manure.
c) Manure contamination of hay when manure is not degraded and/or dung beetles are not present.
Fencerow weed management

Weed growth along fencerows is a common problem. These weeds, often woody perennials, can damage fence integrity and greatly complicate future fence repair. Additionally, cherry trees are very common along fences and pose a significant health risk to any animal that may browse these toxic leaves. As a general rule, removing this vegetation is best for animal health and fence longevity. Fortunately, the fall and early winter months are prime for management of perennial weeds.

Removal of unwanted trees
Controlling small trees can be accomplished using either foliar or basal-bark applications. Although foliar applications are often the preferred method, it can be the most difficult way to get consistently high levels of control. For foliar applications, coverage of all the foliage is key. Spraying only one side of the plant will rarely be effective. Additionally, drift onto non-target plants can result in a large swath of dead grass and other plants. It is also important to select the proper herbicide since rarely will one product work with equal effectiveness on all species. In my opinion, foliar applications should only be used when there are a large number of seedling trees, making individual plant applications impossible.

A more consistent means of tree management is through a basal application. This method combines triclopyr ester (Remedy, others) with basal oil and applies the mixture directly to the trunk of the tree. This method is highly specific with little potential for off-target damage. It is also highly effective for a vast number of tree species. For more information, see Herbi-cide application techniques for woody plant control http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ag245.

Troublesome vines
Another problem I commonly encounter is weedy vines (catclaw vine, kudzu, wild grape, etc). For kudzu, or any other legume weed, an aminopyralid-containing herbicide (GrazonNext or Milestone) is an excellent choice. For other vines I generally recommend triclopyr ester at 0.5 to 1% solution (0.6 to 1.2 oz of herbicide per gallon). It is well documented that glyphosate alone is not highly effective on most vine species. So, glyphosate alone will rarely provide the desired effect. However, I generally recommend mixing glyphosate with the triclopyr to increase the activity and spectrum of control. In this situation, 1 to 2% glyphosate solution will often improve control without significantly adding to the cost of the application.

It is true that weedy fencerows can provide excellent wildlife habitat for many small game and fowl species. Therefore, if this fence exists in a field that is no longer used for cattle production, allowing weeds to encroach can be a great asset to the farm. But, if cattle are present, maintaining a high-quality fence that is free of woody or vine-type weeds should be held in the highest priority.
OSHA’s Revised Hazard Communication Standard

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) revised its Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) to align with the United Nations’ Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS) and published it in the Federal Register in March 2012 (77 FR 17574). Two significant changes contained in the revised standard require the use of new pesticide labeling elements and a standardized format for Safety Data Sheets (SDSs), formerly known as, Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs). The new label elements and SDS requirements are intended to improve worker understanding of the hazards associated with the chemicals in their workplace. To help companies comply with the revised standard, OSHA is phasing in the specific requirements over several years (December 1, 2013 to June 1, 2016).

The first compliance date of the revised HCS is December 1, 2013. By that time employers must have trained their workers on the new label elements and the SDS format. There are several changes in label format that pesticide handlers should be made aware, including:

- **Product signal words** – once manufacturers produce their new labels, there will be only 2 signal words in use: “Danger” and “Warning.”
- **The use of pictograms** – these will indicate a product’s hazard category and will appear in the shape of a square set at a point and include a black hazard symbol on a white background with a red frame.
- **Hazard statement(s)** - these describe the nature of the hazard(s) of a chemical, including, where appropriate, the degree of hazard. For example: “Causes damage to kidneys through prolonged or repeated exposure when absorbed through the skin.”
- **Precautionary statement(s)** - these mean a phrase that describes recommended measures that should be taken to minimize or prevent adverse effects resulting from exposure to a hazardous chemical or improper storage or handling.
- **Name, address and phone number of the chemical manufacturer, distributor, or importer** will now be required.

SDSs will become standardized into a 16-section format, including the type of information found in the various sections. Greater detail concerning these changes may be obtained from OSHA’s Website at:

To follow the link, press “Ctrl” and put cursor over link, and “click.”

Nov 3-6  **ASA, CSSA, & SSA International Annual Meetings.** Tampa, FL.  
https://www.acsmeetings.org/

Nov 6  **2013 Small Ruminant Conference.** Ocala, FL  
To register contact Marion County Extension Office 352-671-8400

Jan 12-14  **American Forage and Grassland Council.** Memphis, TN  
http://www.afgc.org

Feb 3-6  **Weed Science Society of America Annual Meeting.** Vancouver, BC, Canada  
http://www.wssa.net