



Cotton Harvest in the Texas Rolling Plains

COTTON HARVEST in the Texas Rolling Plains around Stamford is slowly, and in some cases, painfully, getting under way.

Rex Ford is the manager of the Farmers Cooperative cotton gin at Stamford. Ford has been the manager since 1992, a cooperative that started in 1928, he said. The cooperative gin has 65 clients who farm, depending on the year, from 25 to 35,000 acres of cotton.



The 2008 cotton crop in the Stamford area, Ford said, will yield about half of what the 2007 record crop made. He ginned 55,783 bales in 2007.

"We are predicting we will gin around 25,000 bales this year," he said. "While it is a smaller crop than last year, we are seeing some really good quality cotton ginned this year."

"We have ginned some 21 3/4 staple length cotton," he said. "Farmers are getting 53 to 54 cents loan rate for this cotton. Although it is early in the ginning season, some farmers are getting one and a half bales to the acre in their dryland cotton. And I don't believe it will be difficult to see some two bale per acre cotton this year."

The 2008 season in Texas saw bad weather ranging from hurricanes in south Texas to exceptional storms in the plains counties that brought crop-damaging rain and winds in excess of 100 miles per hour. Later in the summer, an extended dry period stunted several thousands of acres of the crop.

Ford is active in Plains Cotton Cooperative Assn. activities, serving as the chairman of a compress committee. The Farmers Cooperative is busy with updates for their gin, Ford said. "We installed a new press in the gin this year and we are in the process of upgrading our machinery so we can gin up to 50 bales per hour."

Ford and his staff moved into a new office building earlier this year. "We are certainly enjoying the new facilities," he said.

Ford's cooperative is a member of the Rolling Plains Cotton Growers Assn. One of the members of the association executive board is Stamford farmer, Ferdie Walker.



Walker, along with his wife Suzanne, and two sons, John and Charles, are typical dryland farmers in the southern Texas Rolling Plains.

"We grow winter wheat and cotton in rotation," Walker said. "It can be a one to two or a one to three year rotation that is pretty typical for this area. Modern cotton varieties with Roundup Ready Flex and Bollgard varieties have been good to us. Last year, we had some three bale per acre cotton."

This year will be different, Walker said. The weather problems explained by Ford were experienced by Walker with his 2008 crop,. Although he has some neighbors starting their cotton harvest, Walker is still waiting to get into the field. A three and a half inch rain in September caused his cotton to have a regrowth period, adding stems and leaves but no bolls at that late stage of development.

"I have sprayed all my cotton once, and some of it twice, to get it ready to harvest," Walker said. "I hope I won't have to, but it is looking like I may have to spray some of it a third time to get rid of the extra second growth."

Walker, a graduate of Texas Tech., worked for an oil company in Houston before returning to his family farm. He worked in bulk oil transportation moving oil from Middle Eastern countries and offshore rigs to the refineries in south Texas, he said.

When Walker's father decided to retire, he and his family moved back to Stamford to farm.

Bullish on the future of farming in the Stamford area, Walker has invested in a new boll buggy and updated a cotton module builder with remote control.

TALKIN' COTTON is produced by NTOK Cotton, a cotton industry partnership which supports and encourages cotton production in the Rolling Plains of North Texas. For more information on the cotton scene, see okiecotton.org and ntokcotton.org. For questions or comments on Talkin' Cotton, contact eventerprise1@hughes.net.

