



## Cotton Works Well for Farmers in South Central Oklahoma

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Goldsby, Ok.--NTOK Cotton News--Cotton is an important crop for farmers to use in rotation with other crops in the heavy soils of south central Oklahoma.

Tommy McPherson and his father, Tommy, Sr., farm in this area near Maysville and Pauls Valley.

A neighbor, Willard Fox, also has cotton in his crop rotation.



Known for its rich bottom land farms, cotton was an important crop here for many years. However, boll weevil problems nearly wiped out cotton production until an eradication program was implemented in the late 1990s.

"My dad and I have grown cotton around here for the last 30 years," McPherson said. "We are among the last diehard cotton farmers in this area. We had cotton even during the bad boll weevil problem years."

During the severe drought of 2006, McPherson was able to save a portion of his dryland cotton. "We planted 425 acres of dryland cotton and 350 irrigated acres," he said. "While we only saved 100 dryland acres, it yielded nearly a bale to the acre. And some of the irrigated fields yielded two bales to the acre." Today's modern cotton varieties will yield well if a farmer can get even a little rain, McPherson said. Similar modern varieties use less irrigation water than other crops such as soybeans and corn, he said.

They used transgenic cotton varieties that permit over-the-top weed control without harming the young cotton plants. Some of the varieties also had resistance to bollworm depredations. These varieties, called Roundup Ready for better weed control, and Bollgard for resistance to bollworms, are typical of the new cotton varieties designed to help a farmer make good yields without having to resort to expensive repetitions of pesticide applications. a gin in this area."

"The Roundup Ready cotton has really helped us to fight our weed problems" McPherson said. "Our growing season is longer so weed pressures are higher around here. Cotton also works well for us in rotation with other crops to interrupt weed and disease problems caused by continuous cropping."

Fox also suffered from the drought, but he was able to receive extra rain on a 100 acre field. The extra rain saved the crop, giving him a yield of 423 pounds of lint to the acre.

These dryland cotton yields, occurring during a record drought, point out the ability of modern cotton varieties to give good yields with a minimum of moisture, Fox said.

Both farmers gin their cotton at the Bi-State Cotton Producers Cooperative gin at Minco. While the gin is nearly 55 miles from the area where the McPhersons and Fox farm, modern harvesting technology permits them to place the harvested cotton in modules on the edge of a field. Each module, which is built under pressure in a module builder, contains from 10 to 15 bales of cotton. The modules are then hauled to the gin in a module truck according to the gin's processing schedule.

While this modern technology greatly simplifies the farmers' harvesting problems, there is still a need to find a modern cotton gin closer to them, McPherson said.

"Except for a few acres grown in Cleveland County," McPherson said, "there isn't much cotton grown east of I-35. There aren't any modern cotton gins around here. The boll weevil saw to that. When it became unprofitable to grow cotton due to the insect pest, nearly all of the cotton gins operating back then had to close."

Farming is an important part of the economy around Maysville and Pauls Valley, McPherson said.

"Since this is a highly productive farming area with a lot of land suitable for growing cotton," McPherson said, "more farmers need to know about the advantages of growing cotton with their other crops."

McPherson pointed out cotton is a recognized crop by the USDA with crop insurance available. It is marketed world-wide and is traded on several stock exchanges, he said.

"If we can get more farmers in this area growing cotton again," he said, "maybe we will be able to build a gin in this area".

