



Danny Davis Farm, Elk City, OK 2006 Cotton Crop Under Drought Conditions

Elk City, Ok.--Driving through western Oklahoma, a traveler will see rolling rangeland and deep, tree-choked creek bottoms covered by man's mark of wheat fields and cattle. However, checking more closely, you can find 1,700 acres of good cotton near Elk City.

Growing cotton in this area is not too unusual, but learning the 2006 crop belongs to Flying D. Farms, the property of Danny and Doc Davis, is to acknowledge this father and son grow dryland cotton continuously on no-till acres.



Danny, 50, will tell you how dedicated he and his father, Doc, 74, are in keeping their farm fields fertile and in top production.

A visitor to the home farm can climb in Danny's pickup truck and see where cotton yielded two bales to the acre in the 2005 record-breaking crop.

This year, a heart-breaking season of severe drought left the Davis family wondering at times if they would make any cotton at all, Danny said. But traveling over the same field this year, it is easy to see there will be comparatively good yields made, even with the worst drought to be experienced in many decades. "Prior to the rain we received last week," Danny said, "the last rain came in September, 2005."

There are many reasons for being able to make a crop even under the worst of growing conditions. The most important, of course, is rain. But driving over this particular field, Danny points out the thick ground cover under the verdant cotton plants which has been responsible for catching as much as possible of the little rain they have received this year.

"We broadcast gin trash each year on areas in the fields we think need extra care," Danny said. "That, and we plant rye each fall on all of our fields. In the spring, the rye holds moisture, keeps the soil from eroding and protects the young cotton from wind and blowing sand."

Using a drill they designed and fabricated with special discs and shields, the Davis's plant the rye between the rows of the almost mature cotton. Their tractor also has sheet metal shields welded in front of the front and rear wheels to deflect the cotton plants when it is being used to plant the winter rye.

Danny estimates his 2006 crop will average 400 pounds of lint per acre, not a spectacular yield, but very satisfying to anyone who is surviving the current drought. He says he will harvest all of his cotton this fall. To be able to do this, he credits the no-till farming practices he has followed since 1995.

Before that, searching for alternate crops to continuous wheat, they tried cotton as well as grain sorghum and mungbeans.

Then, they decided to stay with cotton. Determined to keep their farmland from eroding, they pioneered striptill in 1982, then went to strip till where a ripper or tillage tool is used to open a furrow. Then, all fertilizer and seed is planted in that furrow. Later, even more determined to stay with no-till practices, they built their own equipment such as the drill they use to plant.

"It isn't easy to practice no-till farming," Danny said. "It takes time to bring back the fertility in a field that has been plowed for years and where the soil has been left bare to wind and water erosion. It will take three or four years to get a field where it really responds to no-till. After that, as the fertility improves, you will see greater benefits in crop yields".

Danny uses Delta and Pineland cotton varieties. He is primarily concerned with increasing the staple length of the cotton he grows. All of the varieties are Roundup Ready and Bollgard transgenic varieties, he said.

Danny has been a member and director in the National Cotton Council for many years. He takes his responsibility to the organization seriously, having belonged to several important committees at different times.

Cotton farming to the Davis family is not just a source of income, but it is a lifetime of dedication to the crop, Danny says.



"We never do a halfway job of farming cotton," he said. "Cotton demands year 'round attention from a producer. Whenever we make plans for next year's crop, we always swing for the fence. The last two years, we have dusted in every acre of our cotton. Even with such dry planting conditions, we fertilized and planted with the intentions of making top yields. That is the only way we know to do it."

So, with the exception of a small commercial herd of beef cows, Danny and Doc Davis grow cotton. This is why, even during the most severe drought on record, you can see a good crop of cotton on the Flying D Farm near Elk City.

