Dryland Cotton Acreage Increasing in Northern OK & KS

Liberal, Kan.-NTOK Cotton Report--Cotton production in Northern Oklahoma and Kansas continues to be profitable and expand, in spite of the crippling effect of the recent drought.

This opinion reflects the thoughts of Dick Cooper, director for business development for the Plains Cotton Cooperative Assn.

Located at Liberal, Ks, Cooper is responsible for cotton marketing and market development in Kansas and all of Oklahoma north of I-40.

“Realistically," he said," we do not see any increase in irrigated cotton production for 2007 in this area. The advantage cotton has had in irrigated production will not be in play in the short term. Basically, this is due to the tremendous interest in biofuels production. But dryland cotton is still competitive and we expect to see these acres continue to grow."

Cooper explained the region's 2006 cotton crop is 95 percent harvested and 55 percent ginned.

"Cotton farmers in Kansas and the seven northern tiered Oklahoma counties planted 125,000 acres of cotton in 2006," he said. "This planting was a 40 percent increase over 2005.

"Even with the severe drought to combat, the area's cotton crop will have the second highest per acre yield average of 567 pounds as well as the highest quality grades in the history of production in this region."

In 2006, Cooper said, 226 new farms produced cotton. Even with the 2006 drought, he said, cotton production in this area marks 11 years of consistent, sustainable growth.

“New crop cotton futures have not responded to cotton acreage reduction to the degree we expected," he said. "It appears now that many spring planting decisions are being made. Eventually, the market will respond to decreased cotton production and prices will improve."

Cooper believes it is possible this region can maintain and grow total 2007 production even with fewer acres.

There are many reasons for the rapid development of cotton farming in Kansas and northern Oklahoma, Cooper said.

"Sound economics, water conservation, effective crop rotation systems, along with time and labor efficiency have made these 11 years a real success story," he said. Other factors that have come into play, he said, are experience-gained management expertise, better cotton genetics and the establishment of a highly-developed ginning, warehousing and transportation infrastructure.

"With support systems in place at each of the five gin locations and the support of state associations like the Kansas and Oklahoma cotton associations, entry level risk has been greatly reduced from a few short years ago."

Establishing cotton as a viable crop in this area 11 years ago called on the "pioneer spirit" of farming leaders who risked great time, energy and capital to get the ball rolling, he said.

These risks included building five cotton gins on a cooperative basis and encouraging their neighbors to join them, Cooper said.

"These plants are modern, multi-million dollar facilities that require tremendous working capital, " Cooper said. "The need for capital and the ability to forecast growth necessary to service debt was a major challenge in those early years as traditional lenders had no knowledge or experience in cotton production or ginning. For some, just the decision to grow a high management, high input crop was the biggest challenge of all. The current success of this industry rests on the shoulders of those early growers with good business sense, determination and the respect of their neighbors. It has built an industry capable of leading cotton production forward into the future."
Information in this story has been made available by the efforts of NTOK Cotton and the Oklahoma Cotton Council. For more information on cotton production in the Rolling Plains of Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas, check us out at ntokcotton.org. and okiecotton.org.