



NEWS RELEASE OBWEO Story

February 14, 2006

HOBART, Oklahoma -- Millions of pounds of white cotton lint has been harvested this winter from the fields of North Texas and Oklahoma.

The second record crop of cotton in two years is now being processed into bales at area cotton gins. Farmers are making plans to plant even more cotton this spring.

The future of cotton is very bright in the Rolling Plains of North Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. But it wasn't always this way. Cotton has been a viable area agricultural commodity for less than half a decade.

In the late 1990's, many farmers had given up growing cotton. A total of 45 cotton gins and the contribution they made to rural towns dwindled to only 19 gins.

The reason for this dramatic drawdown was the boll weevil. A little flying bug with a huge appetite for succulent, green cotton bolls completely wiped out cotton farming in this area.

Farmers got together and formed the Oklahoma Boll Weevil Eradication Program. Millions of acres of farm land were sprayed, hundreds of people were hired to check cotton traps for evidence of the presence of the weevil. Similar programs are ongoing throughout cotton-growing areas in the United States. In a remarkably short time, the boll weevil was shot down. Last year, only one weevil was caught outside of southeast Oklahoma. A little over 4,000 were caught in southeast Oklahoma.

Hence, the return of thousands of acres of white cotton being harvested and putting new financial life in rural Oklahoma.

Credit for this amazing turnaround goes to the Boll Weevil Eradication Program headquartered at Hobart, Oklahoma, county seat of Kiowa County.

According to Dr. Bill Massey, the eradication program is entering its final phases.

"OBWEO's loan from the Farm Service Agency will be paid off before the first of March, but this does not mean we are going into post-eradication," Dr. Massey said. "We are still catching and spraying weevils in southeast and south central Oklahoma."

The OBWEO board of directors voted Feb. 7, 2006, to reduce the 2006 assessment, where cotton farmers help fund the program, to \$2 per acre and 0.0085 cents per pound of lint cotton, Dr. Massey said. If the 2006 crop comes in with a stable acreage and an average yield, the board members will re-evaluate the situation and, possibly, reduce the assessment again before the 2006 harvest begins, he said.

"Most producers will see a reduction in the number of traps on their fields in 2006," Dr. Massey said. "This reduction in traps is standard procedure as we move forward to complete eradication of the weevil."

OBWEO supervisors will soon begin to contact producers and obtain the information on projected plantings for the 2006 cotton crop, Dr. Massey said.
