

TALKIN' COTTON

NO NEWS is good news these days. Nearly all information about agricultural production in the Southern Plains has been negative for sometime now; basically due to the terrible drought we are experiencing. Those of us who are long enough in the tooth to remember the extended drought of the 1950s clung for sometime to the idea this one would not be as bad, but it is and more. All of the scientific information available shows it is drier, hotter, more acres of crops have been lost, more livestock has been sold due to lack of pasture and water and there is no help in sight. At least the temperatures have abated somewhat and no longer do we and the livestock struggle to breathe and move in continuous plus 100 degree heat.

A few northers have moved through the area, giving up a few hundredths of an inch of moisture along with cooler weather. A few people optimistically wonder out loud at their favorite coffee shop if these few drops are predictors of more thorough rains later in September and October, the typical rainy fall months of this area.

But the meteorologists who monitor the Oklahoma Mesonet, those regional weather check stations, and who have access to other sensitive, international weather guides, tell us La Nina, that bad little sister of El Nino, will probably keep the drought active in the southern US for the rest of this year and well into the next. We can only hope and pray Little Sister is playing a cruel trick on us and wet weather will return sooner.

Another prediction we keep hearing from the old timers who have experienced both drought and flood is when it does start raining, there will be a lot of it for a long time. Weather changes in the plains come with a crash and a bang, no slow, easy changes in the short grass country.

All of this is a long windup for the pitch of how the National Cotton Council is reporting current cotton crop situations.

In its September, 2011, crop report, USDA estimated a US crop of 16.56 million bales. Upland cotton, what they grow around here, estimated to be 15.82 million bales and extra long staple production at 737,000 bales. Harvested area estimated to be 9.85 million acres, implying a non-harvested area of 4.87 million acres, based on USDA's revised June acreage report.

In Texas, 7,550,000 acres of cotton were planted this year. It is estimated only 3,200,000 acres will be harvested. The average pounds of cotton per acre harvested are estimated to be 630 pounds. The five year average is 711 pounds of cotton harvested per acre. This means 4,200,000 480 bales will be harvested.

In Oklahoma, 415,000 acres of cotton were planted this year. It is estimated 100,000 acres will be harvested this fall. It is estimated 432 pounds of cotton per acre will be harvested this year. The five year average is 740 pounds of cotton per harvested acre. This boils down to an estimate of 90,000 480 pound bales for the year.

In Kansas, 78,000 acres of cotton were planted, according to USDA figures. It is estimated 67,000 acres will be harvested. with a yield of 595 pounds of cotton per harvested acre. The five year average for Kansas is 629 pounds per harvested acre. This means 83,000 480 pound bales will be harvested in Kansas this year.

More rain and higher humidity in the Midsouth states (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee) and the western states of Arizona and California have caused USDA to predict better than average to average cotton production for these area.

The resulting national abandonment rate is roughly 33.09 percent, about one third of the total planted crop. The national average yield per harvested acre estimated to be roughly 807 pounds, 15 pounds less than the five-year average.

Many farmers' wells were stretched to the last inch of water to keep up with the demand for moisture. High electricity bills to keep irrigation pumps working ripped a hole in farmers' bank accounts. Nothing about this year's cotton production picture has been good.

TALKIN' COTTON is produced by NTOK Cotton, a cotton industry partnership which supports and encourages increased cotton production in the Rolling Plains of North Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. For more information on the cotton scene, see okiecotton.org and ntokcotton.org. For information or questions about Talkin' Cotton, contact bustersbarn1@yahoo.com.