

TALKIN' COTTON

Altus, Ok.-"Some badly-needed rainfall was received in the southwest corner of Oklahoma in the last few days," Dr. Randy Boman, director of the Oklahoma State University Southwest Research and Extension Center here said. "but high temperatures and winds, drought and fire potential continue to plague the area. It has been 180 days since the last one inch or greater rainfall occurred."

Currently the overall moisture situation is dire, he said, and substantial rainfall is necessary to allow the establishment of the 2011 cotton crop. Many producers with center pivot systems above their ground water have opted for pre-irrigation in order to provide timely stand establishment, he said.

If irrigation capacity for the crop is diminished during the growing season, rainfall will be the only source of water to keep the crop growing, if that occurs, he said.

"If we assume most of the new cotton acreage expected to be grown is non-irrigated, we would likely have about 200-250,000 dryland acres potentially at risk due to extreme drought conditions," Boman said.

"Final planting dates for crop insurance purposes are all June 20, 2011, for non-irrigated cotton in southwestern Oklahoma counties," he said.

Boman believes the irrigated acreage is going to feel drought pressure as well. All irrigation systems, including the Lugert-Altus irrigation district are essentially supplemental to rainfall. he said. "The irrigated acreage is at risk for considerably lower than normal production due to short water availability. We need rainfall soon to preserve the production capability of these dryland and irrigated acres," he said.

The Lugert reservoir is currently at about 47 percent capacity, he said. There is little, if any, water flowing into the reservoir at this time, he said. Based on discussions at a recent meeting, there is concern how the 2011 irrigation run will be done, Boman explained.

"Most likely, the system will be turned on near the end of May," he said. "Producers will be able to irrigate cotton land during the next two weeks or so. The amount of water available will be expended on the 'up front irrigation run.' Therefore, sizable rainfall and runoff into the North Fork watershed will be necessary to provide in-season irrigation.

"Some producers are thinking about "dry planting" their cotton. If they do and receive a one-half inch or or rainfall," Boman said, "this may prove to be just good enough to start the cottonseed germinating. If the germinating seedlings dry out and if there is dry soil beneath the seed, seedling death can occur."

If producers are thinking about "dry planting" several days in front of an irrigation run, this complicates management unless irrigation can be applied shortly after one of these minor rainfall events that can trigger germination in a dry field. he said.

"We just need to watch the forecast and hope for the best," Boman said.

This report and much more can be found in Cotton Comments, a periodical report written by Dr. Boman. Cotton Comments is located online at ntokcotton.org