

TALKIN' COTTON

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Recent rainfall through most of our cotton producing area has really helped get the soil ready for planting. As soon as it dries up this week, planters should be running. Soil temperatures the first of May were borderline cool, so those who waited should have a better chance of establishing the crop without replanting. Hopefully weeds have been controlled in both conventional and no-till areas and the soil conditions will be ready. If weeds are present, it is much better to control them with a herbicide than tillage at this time. If tillage must be used, try to till as shallow as possible to decrease loss of moisture. Deep or moderately deep tillage will allow the soil to dry down to tillage depth, and we can't be assured we will have another rain next week to provide planting moisture. Before you go to the field is the best time to check if the planter is ready. Some common areas that cause problems at planting are furrow opening disks that have a gap at the bottom, seed tubes that are clogged by soil, spider webs, or wasp nests that obstruct seed tubes, uneven tire pressure on gauge wheels, correct vacuum settings, and locked up or tight bearings. These are much easier to check at your leisure in the shop than when you are in a rush to get seed into the ground. Cotton seed is now one of the highest priced inputs, and it is important to get the right number of seed per acre. Differing seed size for each variety and the cost of seed have made it important to calibrate your planter for number of seeds per acre instead of number of pounds of seed per acre. Normally on irrigated soils, we recommend 40,000 to 55,000 seed per acre and in dryland production we recommend 30,000 to 40,000 seeds per acre. These populations are for any row spacing, but on 40 inch rows, it calculates to about 2.5 to 3 seed per foot on dryland and 3 to 4.2 seeds per foot on irrigated production. Ideally, the seed should be pressed into undisturbed soil at about one inch deep, and covered with moist soil.