

Effective Defoliant Can Slow Regrowth

Last year at defoliation time, a hot, dry summer followed by August rains had producers from Texas to the Carolinas scrambling to control regrowth, while simultaneously taking advantage of the yield potential of some late-making cotton.

“We were just bone-dry much of the year,” says David Cox, a cotton producer in Pinehurst, Ga. “We were looking at 150 to 200 pounds of cotton per acre. The late rains saved us, really. We ended up with a bale-and-a-half to two bales per acre, but we didn’t harvest until November. It was quite a year, and I hope to never have another one like it.”

Fortunately, for Cox, he uses a defoliation system designed to avoid problems with regrowth. He applies a rather “hot” defoliation mix of ET and FirstPick, then picks an average of eight days later before any regrowth can get started up the stalk.

“Regrowth becomes an issue only if you’re not going to be picking for two or three weeks,” explains Cox. “My preference is to spray one week and pick the next. When we’re ready to defoliate, we like to get after it.”

Cox farms 400 acres of cotton with his son, Ben, and he consults on 8,000 acres of cotton. He’s also a part-owner of Planters Warehouse and Griggs Gin Company as well as an agricultural chemical dealership in Pinehurst.

He has seen just about every defoliation system out there, “but it usually comes down to one of two ways,” he says. “Either a guy will do what we do – two ounces of ET and a half-gallon of FirstPick per acre – or he’ll go with a three-way combination of Prep, ET and Dropp.”

Flexibility At Harvest

The advantage of the three-way combination is that there is more flexibility in picking and more peace of



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mind. Producers are familiar with Prep and Dropp, and the Dropp helps control any regrowth.

“Regrowth is a real concern for those guys,” says Cox. “With Prep, ET and Dropp, the cotton isn’t ready for picking for 14 to 21 days, so there’s a real chance for regrowth moving up on the cotton stalk.”

That’s the reason Cox prefers a faster-acting approach.

“As soon as you start taking leaves off of a cotton plant, the cotton starts to deteriorate,” he says. “With ET and FirstPick – which is the reformulated CottonQuik – we can spray once and pick eight days later. ET is also labeled as a herbicide, so you know that you’re going to get a good, clean defoliation of all of your green leaves. ET actually drops the petiole green, so it doesn’t stick leaves.”

Because ET is also a herbicide, its activity in plants is well-known,

says Cox.

It’s a sound strategy, but it carries some additional risk, says Georgia Extension cotton specialist Steve Brown.

“It makes sense if you can get in quickly and get your cotton picked,” says Brown. “But there are situations where rain can delay you, or you have trouble scheduling your harvest.”

Even then, the crop might not suffer, says Brown.

“But it can get so bad that a grower has to re-treat, or he has to deal with green stains on his cotton,” he says. “In that case, he’s going to be thinking in retrospect that he should have used a regrowth inhibitor.”

Do Your Homework

Cox understands the risks.

“With this system, you have to do your homework upfront,” he says. “You have to watch your cotton, and you have to watch the weather. If we see rain coming our way, we will usually pull up and stop until it’s passed. Or if we’ve already sprayed, we might go in a little quicker and pick the cotton.”

One thing in his favor, says Cox, is that he always has the option of adding a regrowth inhibitor such as Dropp.

“Nine times out of 10, we get after it and in doing so, we take regrowth out of the picture. But if the weather does not cooperate or a customer asks for it, we can always add Dropp to the mix,” he says. 📍

Nichino provided information for this article.

Defoliation Strategies

- Hot mixes lead to early harvest
- Try to prevent regrowth
- Fast-acting systems are a plus
- Be aware of impending rainfall
- Do your homework upfront