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by Farm Progress[®]

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2025

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NC STATE RAISES SOYBEAN
DEFOLIATION THRESHOLDS **8**

SENSORS DETECT BLACKLANDS
SALTWATER INTRUSION **14**

HEAVY RAIN MAKES BENGHAL
DAYFLOWER A 'MONSOON' WEED **16**



More cameras, even more action

Chris Reberg-Horton, professor of cropping systems at North Carolina State University and co-director of Precision Sustainable Agriculture, said computer vision's accessibility makes it an intuitive and affordable way to increase innovation on the farm. Read more on Page 6.

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COMMENTARY

Sustaining current peanut acres is questionable

For several years, peanuts helped farmers remain on the economic life raft as commodity prices sank.

But that peanut lift isn't guaranteed. Farmers planted a lot of peanuts this year, which could be a problem.

Prices for competing crops like cotton have remained submerged below production costs. As a result, peanut farmers have increased acres for three consecutive years. They planted more than 1.9 million acres this year, slightly less than the record 2 million acres in 1991.

This summer, Scott Monfort, University of Georgia Extension peanut specialist, moderated a farmer panel during the Southern Peanut Growers Conference. The session included questions directed at the audience of farmers and industry representatives. They answered questions using wireless remotes. The answers were compiled and shared in real time.

"Can we sustain the current production acres we have right now?" Monfort asked. "No!" was the answer.

To make the acres increase, growers have shortened rotational practices, which lead to disease, resistance and yield reduction.

Half said 10% of their peanut acres are on a one-year-or-less rotation, and 7% said 11% to 20% were on that narrow rotation.

For a rotational alternative crop, a third picked fruits or vegetables, 20% tapped grazing and 20% picked sorghum.

Nobody knows what the final average yield will be for peanuts



BRAD HAIRE

this year, but peanuts look good in many locations as of mid-August. If we harvest at least 1.85 million acres with the same average yield as last year, we will produce 3.55 million tons this year. Subtract typical domestic and export usage, and carryover supply would be over a million tons. That will not spark higher prices for peanuts going into 2026. [Note: I am not an economist, but that wasn't a WAG.]

The audience agreed we must explore non-edible markets. Smart people are looking at jet fuel, poultry markets and other alternatives. We have good people

working to expand those markets and opportunities for peanut, such as state peanut commodity groups, National Peanut Board and the American Peanut Council. One telling question during the session hit close to home for all in the room: "Has stress caused you some reservations about continuing to farm or having an agricultural business?"

More than three-quarters of the audience confirmed, "Yes." That is sobering.



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ISSUES

Keeping the Southeast as the Land of Cotton

Of all the crops grown across the Southeast, cotton is the most romantic. Cotton has always been a temperamental and challenging crop, but the "white gold" is entwined in the very fabric of the South because it built communities and brought wealth to those who produced it.

Cotton has always been a difficult crop to grow, but for many cotton farmers, that difficulty is the greatest reward. Of all the crops a farmer grows, cotton responds the best to active management. Sure, it's a tough crop to grow, but in the end, it delivers dividends.

Cotton farmers have faced tough times in the past. But the worry is that today's challenges are different. Something is amiss in the land of cotton. For the third straight year, prices are below production cost, and farmers are abandoning cotton acres for corn, soybeans, and peanuts. The worry is that demand shows no signs of improving. Polyester remains a fearsome foe, and cash-strapped consumers are simply not buying blue jeans, towels, and clothing made from cotton. Consumers need more cash in their pockets and the desire to buy a new pair of blue jeans rather than a pair of polyester yoga pants. They need to purchase more cotton products. At a session with farmers Aug. 12 at the Northampton County Extension Center in Jackson, N.C., First District North Carolina Congressman Don Davis, a Democrat and member of the



JOHN HART

House Agriculture Committee, listened to the challenges farmers face. Joe Martin, of Conway, N.C., told the congressman that commodity prices are lower than they were 20 to 30 years ago, but production costs are much higher. Martin said the talk is that times today aren't as tough as the farm recession of the 1980s, but he stressed that actually, things are worse.

Martin said in the 1980s, a tractor cost just \$28,000. Today, a tractor costs more than \$400,000, and interest rates to finance that tractor are 8 to 10%. "It's hard to get ahead when you're having to refinance what you have at that high a price."

Cotton farmers have come together in the past to overcome insurmountable challenges. The tremendous success of the boll weevil eradication program and the establishment of Cotton Incorporated in 1970 to overcome competition from synthetic fibers are two shining examples.

Markets always go through cycles. Hopefully, the up cycle will come, and cotton prices will return to profitable levels. But that will only come from increased demand.

Hopefully, cotton farmers will find a way to come together to preserve the crop they love to grow. They have done this before and must do it again. I am confident they will succeed. It would be a travesty if the Southeast were no longer the land of cotton.

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Deere digital repair tool: Farmers still debate access

BY ANDY CASTILLO

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JOHN DEERE'S NEW digital repair tool, Operations Center Pro Service, lets farmers and independent machine shops access and clear trouble codes, diagnose, reprogram, calibrate, repair, and protect their equipment.

Through Deere's self-repair suite, farmers can access operator and technical manuals, view quick-reference guides and instructional maintenance videos, and find and buy parts online. They can also use Equipment Mobile, a free, one-stop app that includes maintenance plans, quick reference information, trouble-code lookup and software updates on some 4G connected machines.

The company states the new tool as "a significant milestone" that adds to existing tools and "reaffirms our long-standing commitment to empowering customers to choose how they repair their equipment."

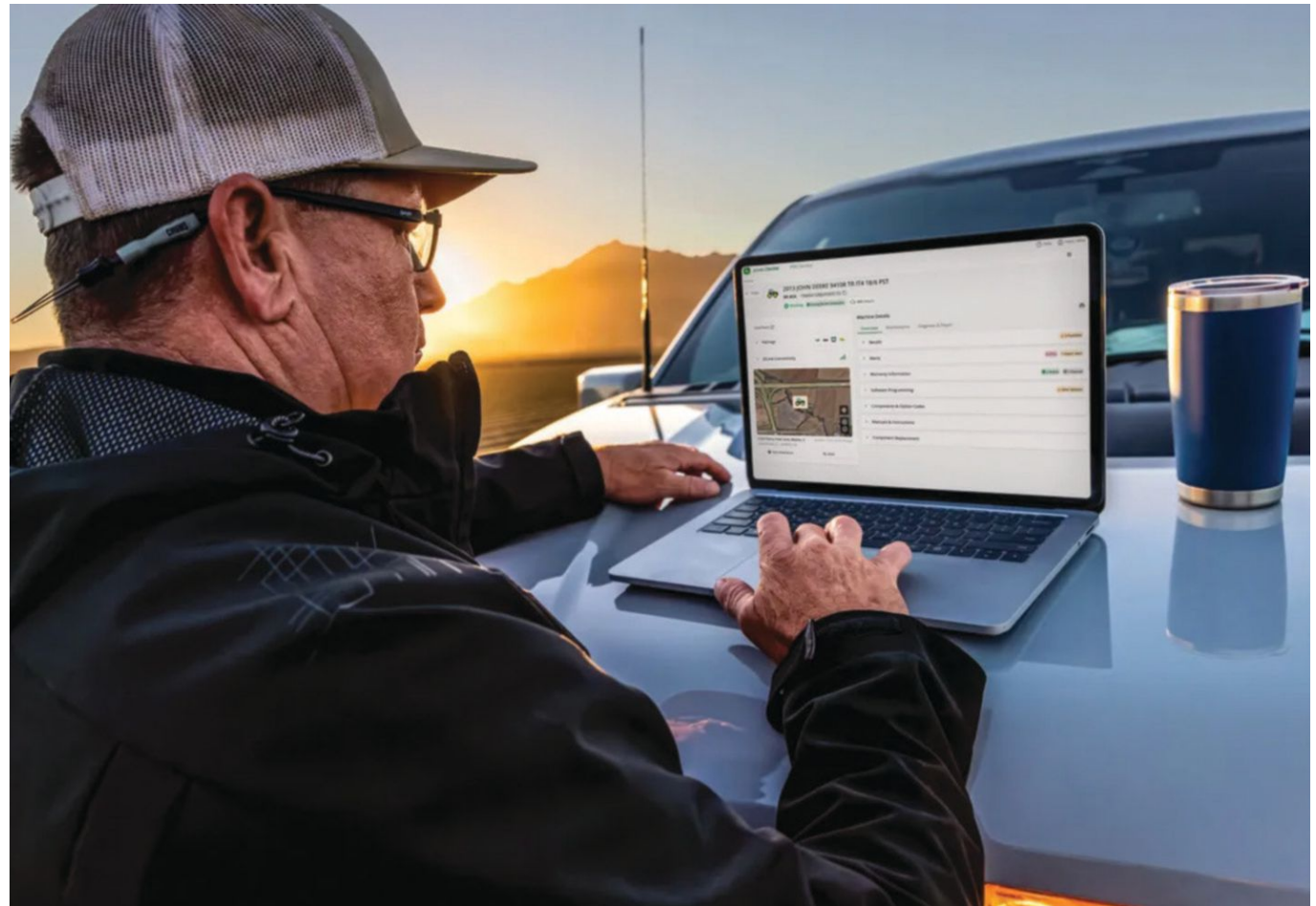
"As our equipment has become more technologically advanced, so too have the repair tools needed to advance customer capabilities," said Denver Caldwell, vice president of aftermarket and customer support. "We are committed to offering customers the best equipment ownership experience, both in the form of world-class dealer support and extensive self-repair resources. This offering advances our goal of minimizing customers' unplanned downtime, and enables them to be more productive and profitable in their operations."

Available via an annual \$195-per-machine license, Operations Center Pro Service will phase out the more restricted legacy John Deere Customer Service Advisor tool. Some service features are still restricted. It represents Deere's response to a Federal Trade Commission lawsuit earlier this year, which instructed the company to give farmers and independent repair providers access to Advisor and "any other repair resources available to authorized dealers," according to an FTC statement.

OPPOSING PERSPECTIVE

While a notable step in the right direction, Willie Cade, with the right-to-repair advocacy organization Farm Action, thinks Operations Center Pro is still gatekeeping.

"Instead of finally delivering true ownership rights, Deere has introduced yet another paywalled, limited-access platform



SELF-REPAIR: John Deere is giving farmers access to their machines via a new tool, Operations Center Pro Service, which enables diagnostics, reprogramming, calibration and self-repair, among other actions. JOHN DEERE

— one that charges \$195 per machine per year and still withholds 'certain interactive tests, calibrations and reprogramming' at launch," said Cade, whose grandfather, Theo Brown, served as chief engineer at John Deere in 1925 and held more than 150 ag-tech related patents.

"My position is clear: Repair should not be paywalled," Cade said. "Farmers have the skill and experience to maintain their own machines without annual licensing hurdles. Independent repair providers deserve equal footing. ... Ownership should mean control. Farmers paid for their equipment, and they should control how it is repaired and who repairs it."

Over the last decade, Cade said original manufacturers have embedded electronic serial numbers on parts, both complex and simple, like moisture meters, which require "military-grade encryption" to access. Without dealer-specific software to pair new components, non-encrypted parts remain nonfunctional, he said. This requires farmers to purchase brand-specific

parts even when identical aftermarket versions exist, oftentimes for less money.

"They [original equipment manufacturers] erroneously claim ownership of a device or its functionality after they sell it to the end user, the farmer. That's the push of this whole thing in my mind," Cade said. "I think it's a disservice to customers to assume that these guys don't have the skills or they're not going to be able to do it safely."

LEGAL BACKGROUND

The right to repair is a hot-button issue that evokes strong opinions on each side. Farmers and local repair shops advocate for the ability to repair as they always have. Equipment dealers and manufacturers, meanwhile, argue that modern machines require specialized know-how to maintain. Keeping repairs in-house is a safety issue.

The legality of this latter stance boiled over earlier this year when the FTC sued John Deere, alleging that "Deere's unlawful practices have limited the ability

of farmers and independent repair providers to repair Deere equipment, forcing farmers to instead rely on Deere's network of authorized dealers for necessary repairs," according to the statement from the federal regulatory agency. This practice burdens "farmers with higher repair costs."

LOOKING AHEAD

John Deere said its Operations Center Pro Service tool will help reduce those costs by once again empowering farmers to maintain their own equipment. And looking ahead, the brand expects to make it even easier for farmers to work on their own machines and keep systems up to date.

"John Deere has a long-standing commitment to enhancing our customers' ability to repair their equipment. Consistent with that commitment, we've continued to deliver new and enhanced solutions designed to improve that experience," Caldwell said.

For more information, visit deere.com/repair.

'Cameras Everywhere' precision ag coming

BY JOHN HART

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BEYOND DOUBT, ARTIFICIAL intelligence is now the driving force in precision agriculture. But there are two questions on its impact:

1. How fast is the technology coming?
2. How dramatically will farming change?

The topic is top of mind for Chris Reberg-Horton, professor of cropping systems at North Carolina State University. He is also co-director of Precision Sustainable Agriculture, a network of on-farm and on-station experiments that utilize the latest developments in sensors, IoT platforms, and machine learning to collect and standardize field data from a wide range of agricultural environments.

The network operates in 25 states with more than 120 locations.

'CAMERA-EVERYWHERE' CONCEPT

While Reberg-Horton is confident robots are coming to the farm, he stressed that they won't be planting, harvesting, and controlling pests for another 15 to 20 years.

He noted that computer vision, or simple camera technology, is here now and can immediately change farming when utilized.

"It's going to be that 'camera everywhere' concept. I think there should be cameras strapped to every piece of machinery you bring into a field. They are so low cost now that there is no reason that you should not put them everywhere," Horton told peanut scientists at the 57th annual meeting of American Peanut Research and Education Society (APRES) July 16 at the Omni Hotel in Richmond.

"They are not meant for specific tasks. They are meant for all tasks: diseases, fertility, insects, weed infestations, and should be trainable for these camera systems. Every time a farmer is moving through a field, we are mapping that field for stresses we can detect," Reberg-Horton said.

TEACHING THE MACHINE

Reberg-Horton told the conference of peanut researchers and educators that they will play a key role in helping farmers adopt computer vision and robotics into their operations. He said farmers will soon be able to target the technology to specific

tasks, crops, and pest challenges. He said agriculture is "100,000 different cases that have to be done."

"Computer vision isn't just about counting things. It can do a whole lot more things. The key to computer vision is experts annotating images. We have to teach the machine. You're not coding it; you're teaching it like you teach your dog to do something," Reberg-Horton said.

Technology, though already precise and sophisticated, is changing rapidly. Reberg-Horton said artificial intelligence will need a minimum of 5,000 images to perform a task.

For example, Reberg-Horton said computer vision is so good now that it cannot only detect the difference between clover and grass in a field, but it can detect the difference between red clover and white clover. However, thousands of images annotated at a very precise level are needed for the system to work.

EQUIPMENT CHANGES

Reberg-Horton said drones and robots coming to the farm in the future will allow farmers to rely on much smaller equipment rather than huge tractors, combines, and

spray rigs. He said equipment became so big in the first place because farmers were trying to reduce the number of operators driving the equipment.

"It is really expensive to put an operator out there. But once we're autonomous, things will be moving through the field on their own. What seems like a better investment? One 120-foot sprayer, or maybe six of them that are only 20 feet wide or maybe 10 that are 12 feet wide? The question of how small a robot should be is going to be a fundamentally different question and a different answer than how big equipment is currently," Reberg-Horton said.

"We are going to shrink down to the smallest size that does the job. Big farms will get a bunch of them. Small farms will get fewer of them. There will be swarms of them, and you will have an economy of scale," he said.

"John Deere won't have to make 12 different sizes of these things. They will make one. The bigger you are, the bigger the swarm your order will be. It will work night and day. It will cover a whole lot of ground. If you lose one or two, whatever, there is a ton of them out there, whereas if your million dollar combine goes down, you got a problem."

TECH ON THE FARM: Chris Reberg-Horton, professor of cropping systems at North Carolina State University is researching the impact of precision agriculture on the industry. THANADON NANSANEE/ISTOCK/GETTY



5 things top forage producers reliably do

BY RON SMITH

Contributing Writer

THE SOUTHEASTERN HAY Contest is about quality and spotlighting top forage producers you can learn from.

"It has always been about promoting the need for testing hay quality," said Lisa Baxter, University of Georgia forage Extension specialist and chairman of the 2025 contest committee.

Winners are chosen based on relative forage quality, independent of species or packaging. The contest is now open to entries from 13 states, west to Oklahoma and Texas to I-35, and north to Kentucky and Virginia. Last year, the contest hit a record high with 496 entries. Winners in nine categories will be announced Oct. 15 following the opening ceremonies at the Sunbelt Ag Expo in Moultrie, Ga.

Based on 21 years of data from submissions, Baxter offered the top 5 things good forage producers consistently do:

1. Cut at the correct stage of growth, depending on species. Bermuda, the biggest category, should be harvested every 30 days to maximize quality. Harvest at boot stage of summer, or winter annuals and legumes before 10% bloom.
2. Maintain equipment. During rainy periods, producers may have only a three-day window to cut. They do not want to spend part of that time fixing equipment. Ensure everything is ready to go.
3. Test hay before feeding, even if not submitting to the contest. Know what you are feeding and how to supplement it. Confirm you have the right commodity byproducts to meet the deficits in the hay (which can be pricey). Testing can save money down the road.
4. Test soil in hay fields annually, regardless of species. In hay fields, you apply nutrients, chop them and take them away, so a hay field can become nutrient-deficient more quickly than pasture, which can be tested every three years.
5. Apply potassium. The tendency is to focus on nitrogen, which helps forage grow big and green. However, Baxter often recommends applying potassium, which aids plant health, density and longevity. Hay contest data show

that without dense stands, increased ash content is more likely. Ash pulls down forage quality.

Over 21 years, the contest has faced numerous changes, but improvements in haying equipment and packaging have not altered the main criterion: quality. The con-

test has expanded through sponsor involvement, which helps fuel interest. "Sponsoring companies use the contest on their marketing material," Baxter said.

The contest includes nine category sponsors and the overall title sponsor, Massey Ferguson. States may also sponsor an agent

award to honor the participating county Extension agent who submits the most samples. Operation size does not matter. "Anyone with a managed hay field is qualified. Producers work with local Extension agents who sign off on entries to make certain they are handled correctly," she said.



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NC State raises soybean defoliation thresholds

BY JOHN HART

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AMID THE CURRENT climate of low commodity prices and high input costs, North Carolina State University Extension Entomologist Dominic Reisig continues emphasizing the importance of thresholds for an effective Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program.

Thresholds are the breakeven point of applying insecticides. As part of an IPM program, farmers should scout fields regularly and only treat when pest populations reach economic threshold or profit-threatening levels.

Reisig says the practice is important for most crops, including cotton, corn, and soybeans.

"It costs money to make that insecti-

cide treatment. It costs scouting time, wear and tear on equipment, diesel fuel, cost of insecticide etc. If we were farming for yield, and we wanted to manage insects, we might say spray an insecticide every week, but we would not be profitable," Reisig said in a presentation on managing defoliation thresholds in soybeans at the Blackland Farm Managers Tour Aug. 6 at Green Valley Farms in Columbia.

"In addition we would be driving up resistance because we would be exposing the insect to unneeded insecticides and selecting for those resistant ones. The thresholds help us know where that break-even point is. We (NC State) actually set our thresholds a little bit below the break-even point because we don't want growers to experience any sort of damage to the crop," Reisig said.

INCREASING THE THRESHOLD

At the Blackland field day, Reisig announced that N.C. State is now raising its defoliation thresholds on full-season soybeans from 15 to 25%.

The decision is based on research conducted at the Coastal Plain Research Station in Rocky Mount.

Reisig said studies reveal that full-season soybean plants can tolerate 66% defoliation without a yield loss.

He explained the methodology used in the labor-intensive research, which led to the decision to raise the defoliation thresholds.

Reisig and his team manually removed leaves from soybean plants at the Coastal Plain Research Station.

The researchers compared soybeans in four groups:

- Plants where none of the leaves were removed
- Plants where one leaflet from every other trifoliate was removed
- Plants where one leaflet was removed on every trifoliate
- Plants where every single leaf on the soybean plant was removed

"A really surprising result was that in full season beans, in order to see any yield loss, we had to remove every single leaf from the soybean plant. The plant could tolerate so much defoliation that we had to strip every single leaf off the plant before we saw yield loss doing this at R5. The plant just has a lot of horsepower in it. It makes more leaves than it needs. It retains energy in its stems and roots. It was actually able to produce new trifoliates after this defoliation," Reisig said.

TALKING SHOP: Attendees at the Blackland Farm Managers Tour held Aug. 6 at Green Valley Farms in Columbia inspect soybean and corn research plots. The 55th annual Blackland Farm Managers Tour, the largest field day in North Carolina, drew a crowd of 400 to the Hyde County farm. JOHN HART



Reisig said the study was conducted at the Coastal Plain Research Station to impose the typical level of stress soybean plants can face in North Carolina's Coastal Plain.

"The soils there are sandy. We didn't irrigate. We didn't have the same yield potential that we have here in the Blacklands."

The N.C. State scientists used 15-inch row spacings in their soybean plots, compared to Reisig's usual practice of 36-inch row spacings.

Reisig said he typically takes that approach because it is easier to sample insects that way, but in the defoliation study, they wanted to use the typical row spacings soybean farmers use to make the study as realistic as possible.

"In the Blacklands, where we have excellent yield potential and usually have really good canopies on full season beans, we can really lean in on that 25% threshold and tolerate a little bit more defoliation than we are used to," Reisig said.

NO CHANGES TO DOUBLE CROP

For double-crop soybeans, N.C. State is keeping its threshold recommendations at 15% defoliation. "We have less of a canopy, a shorter growing season, and less potential for compensation," Reisig explained.

Another surprising result from the study was a numerical yield bump in full-season soybeans where a leaflet was removed from every other trifoliate.

"I think what we are seeing is the ability of that plant to compensate for a low level of defoliation in such that it is getting a little defoliation on the plant. It's got a lot of reproductive potential, and it is signaling to the plant to put a little bit of extra energy into those reproductive tissues, shoveling it away from vegetative growth. We can tolerate much more defoliation than we are used to on those soybeans," Reisig said.

Reisig said different insect species can defoliate soybeans in North Carolina. Some are permanent residents of North Carolina and overwinter in the state, showing up annually. Reisig said these pests can be tough to control.

"An example is the bean leaf beetle. It is getting tougher and tougher to control with insecticides. Other defoliators that are native include Japanese beetle, blister beetle, and together these form a complex where we lump them all together, we can reach defoliation no matter what insect you spray," Reisig said.

KNOW WHAT TO SPRAY

In the Blacklands, Reisig said migratory insect pests are more problematic. These

tropical bugs thrive in North Carolina in the summer, but they cannot overwinter here.

"It's a good place to be if you're a tropical insect. These insects will migrate from south to north, lay their eggs in our soybean fields and defoliate plants. Examples include soybean looper, beet armyworm, fall armyworm and the velvetbean caterpillar. It's important to know what you have, to know what you want to spray. All of those

insects do not respond to insecticides the same way," Reisig said.

To control the velvetbean caterpillar, Reisig said a farmer can open a jug of any insecticide and kill the pest.

"Soybean loopers are much tougher to kill. We have to reach for a caterpillar-specific insecticide. Products like Denim, Intrepid Edge, Steward, and Blackhawk are all good insecticides for soybean looper control," he said.

For caterpillar control, Besiege, Elevest and Vantacor are all good insecticide options, but Reisig said these products tend to offer weaker control of soybean loopers.

This all demonstrates the importance of scouting to know what pest you have so you can select the right product for control.

"Scouting remains your number one strategy to control insects in soybeans and all cash crops," the entomologist emphasized.

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Diseases will not sleep through September

TAILGATE TALK

BY BOB KEMERAIT

Contributing Writer

SEPTEMBER IS THE month of reckoning for peanut and cotton farmers in the Southeast. There is no better time to see the results of decisions made to manage diseases and nematodes over the entire season.

One of my favorite Green Day songs is “Wake Me Up When September Ends.” But for us farmers, it is not a month to snooze through. Diseases and nematodes won’t be sleeping either.

Though late in the growing season, September may not mark the end of fungicide applications. Peanuts, depending on the variety and the amount of disease present in the field, should be protected with fungicides until two to three weeks of harvest. In the past, this often meant a seven-spray program. With today’s longer-season cultivars, it may mean an eight-spray program.

Cotton is vulnerable to target spot until the sixth week of bloom and to areolate mildew until within four weeks of anticipated defoliation.

Late-planted corn is particularly susceptible to southern rust and tar spot.

Depending upon yield potential, corn may need to be protected until it reaches the hard dough stage.

Losses to diseases may be particularly severe in 2025. Extremely hot days coupled with warm, humid nights during the later days of July created conditions quite favorable for the spread of white mold in peanuts. Cooler temperatures and abundant rain in early August may have slowed white mold temporarily. However, these same conditions were near-perfect for leaf spot diseases, areolate mildew and target spot. This weather set the stage for significant disease outbreaks throughout the remainder of the season.

Below are points I encourage peanut and cotton growers to consider this month and throughout the harvest season.

- If a peanut crop has two or more weeks to go until the projected digging date, it is prudent to assess the need for further fungicide applications. A field clean of leaf spot and white mold needs no more protection beginning three weeks from digging. A field already over 25% defoliation from leaf spot is unlikely to respond to additional fungicides. Active white mold in a field or moderate levels of leaf spot are good candidates for fungicide applications until two weeks before

anticipated digging.

- UGA Extension does not recommend digging a field early as a response to tomato spotted wilt disease. However, fields that have reached 50-60% defoliation from leaf spot will begin to lose pods as the peg strength is weakened. In such cases, digging dates should be scheduled earlier, rather than later. Fields approaching 50% incidence of white mold are also candidates for shortening the time until digging to minimize harvest losses.
- Areas of stunting or poor growth in a field should be examined to determine the cause. Nematodes are often responsible for such spots in peanuts and cotton. *Cylindrocladium* black rot may also be a problem in peanuts. *Fusarium* wilt will cause similar problems in cotton. In some instances, the reason for poor growth may not be related to diseases or nematodes at all. However, the longer a grower waits to diagnose the problem, the less likely it is that the cause will ever be determined.
- Growers should assess the amount of peanut leaf spot diseases, white mold, tomato spotted wilt and nematodes in a peanut field in September. If there is little disease present, or if

the amount of disease is “acceptable,” then the grower can be confident that under conditions favorable for disease during the 2025 season, the complete disease management program (Peanut Rx + fungicide program) was successful. However, if there was more disease in the field than expected, then the grower should revisit the management plan and determine where improvements can be made for “next time.” The same holds true for cotton, corn and soybean crops.

- Growers should make plans to collect soil samples for assessment of nematodes in fields as soon after harvest as possible. Nematode results become less reliable when collected from colder soils. Cotton growers should also consider pulling cotton stalks soon after harvest to reduce the continued increase in nematode populations.

Green Day sings, “ring out the bells again, like we did when spring began, wake me when September ends.” However, farmers do not have the luxury of resting this month. There is too much to be done now. Intense focus on nematodes and diseases won’t wait.

Kemerait is a University of Georgia Extension plant pathologist

After 27 years, Southeast peaches return to Mexico

FARM PROGRESS STAFF

SINCE 1994, MEXICO has had strict import restrictions on peaches produced in the southeastern U.S. due to pest concerns, but earlier in June, Georgia peaches were exported to Mexico for the first time in 27 years.

The path to export came from the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Genuine Georgia and the Atlanta-based Reveam, which has a proprietary, USDA-approved Electronic Cold-Pasteurization technology that helped Genuine Georgia meet Mexico’s strict import requirements, according to a June 20 GDA statement.

So far, 42,000 pounds of Georgia

peaches have been shipped to Mexico.

“Expanding access to reliable markets for Georgia producers is absolutely critical to ensure the continued success of our state’s No. 1 industry and our farm families,” said Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper.

“The partnership between Genuine Georgia and Reveam is a win for Georgia farmers and a blueprint for how our industry can use cutting-edge technology, like Reveam’s Electronic Cold-Pasteurization process, to break down barriers to international trade, exceed international food safety standards, and reduce food waste.”

“There are a lot of peach eaters in Mexico, and a lot of them would love to

have those Georgia peaches,” said President of the Georgia Peach Council Duke Lane. “To give you a perspective of how many potential peach eaters are down there, you’ve got 22 million people in Mexico City and the surrounding areas. All of a sudden, we’re now bringing on another 20-plus million customers.”

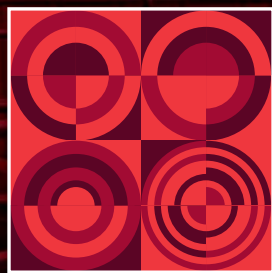
“This is about more than just opening market access. It’s a transformation of what’s possible for Georgia and Southeastern agriculture,” said Chip Starns, Reveam co-founder and chief regulatory officer “Our ECP technology is giving Georgia growers the opportunity to reach new consumers, reduce waste and meet the most rigorous international standards while allowing resi-

dents of Mexico to enjoy the finest peaches in the world without compromising freshness or flavor.”

The Reveam ECP technology uses electron beams to eliminate pests and pathogens without chemicals or heat, helping maintain the quality and shelf life of fresh peaches while meeting Mexico’s import requirements.

USDA and GDA officials now inspect each shipment and issue a phytosanitary certificate verifying its compliance with international standards. With support from Reveam’s treatment facility in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, Georgia growers now meet Mexico’s safety and quality protocols.

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 **FarmProgress**

Autonomous tractor shows its independence to Midsouth farmers

BY WHITNEY SHANNON HECKEL

whitney.heckel@farmprogress.com

WHEN YOU LIVE in farm country, it's common to see a farmer driving a tractor through a field. But visitors to a farm in Newport, Ark., in July got to see a tractor that drives itself.

It was the Midsouth debut of John Deere's fully autonomous 8R tractor. The event was hosted by Greenway Equipment Inc. at the Greenway Technology Farm, just off U.S. Highway 567.

Ag tech experts and representatives from John Deere and Greenway were on hand to answer questions. Some onlookers were simply awestruck, while others seriously contemplated incorporating the technology on their operations.

"A lot of the value in autonomy is what you are able to do while you are not sitting in that tractor," said Bryan Thul, John Deere product manager for autonomy.

The development of the autonomous tractor reflects advances at John Deere dating back to the early 2000s, including AutoTrac Turn Automation, AutoPath and the Operations Center.

For years, farmers have relied on these technologies to improve workflow and farm management with features like autosteer, satellite mapping and real-time data capture. Each is foundational to John Deere's autonomous technology.

Packaged with cutting-edge innovation and artificial intelligence, the tractor can drive itself. Initial setup can be done inside or outside the cab:

- outside and away from the field through the Operations Center, via a mobile device or the internet
- inside the cab manually

Once autonomy is turned on, everything else is executed through the Operations Center's mobile app. In the app, the tractor starts with the click of a button.

For safety, the tractor will not start unless the farmer is within 1,500 feet.

"This is a safety feature to ensure there is no one underneath the tractor," Thul said.

Once started, the machine can operate independently in the field, without the supervision of the farmer, and will report any issues or obstacles directly through Deere's Operations Center.

Upon ignition, the tractor's horn sounds and lights flash as a warning that the equipment is preparing to accelerate. As the tractor rolls, it follows the path mapped in the Operations Center. Row after row, it turns on its own until reaching the predetermined endpoint in the field.

The farmer can stop the tractor at any time. Or the tractor can be directed to stop at the end of the current row or end of the next row, which is ideal for refueling or to grab something out of the cab.

16 CAMERAS ON FULL WATCH

As the tractor moves through the field, safety calls the shots. Mounted on the roof of the tractor, 16 cameras provide a 360-degree view around both the tractor and tillage equipment. These cameras are powered by artificial intelligence, constantly working as a "safety shield" to detect any obstructions in the field.

Detection and recognition include exterior obstacles like fence lines or ditches, as well as interior objects like power poles, wellheads or windmills. If the tractor encounters an obstacle, it either stops immediately or reroutes. In either event, the



ARKANSAS UNVEILING: The John Deere fully autonomous 8R tractor was unveiled for the first time in the Midsouth this summer. PHOTOS BY WHITNEY SHANNON HECKEL



FOLLOWING THE PATH: The autonomous tractor follows the path laid out in the Operations Center. It turns by itself and can stop on a dime.

operator instantly receives an alert along with an image of the obstruction.

"Autonomy is based in and requires connectivity so that images can be sent at lightening speed to a farmer," Thul said.

The cameras can distinguish between major obstacles versus smaller items like grocery bags, soda cans and even small animals that leave the frame of the camera. In this case, a farmer will not receive an alert.

"We do not want to bog down a farmer's time with constant alerts," Thul said. "It only sends an alert if it is something the farmer has to interact with or compensate for due to a reroute."

The tractor can be operated at night, in the dust or in light rain. Thul said the technology has proven to work well when tested in dusty conditions. As for rain, once enough water accumulates on the camera

lenses, the tractor stops on its own.

"Remember, the cameras are its eyes," Thul said.

UNLIMITED POTENTIAL OF AUTONOMY

The autonomy package is available for select John Deere tractor models, from the latest releases to those dating back to 2020. Currently, only tillage implements are compatible with the technology, but extended compatibility is on the horizon.

Thul said eventually, autonomy will be available for equipment and implements from planting and spraying all the way through harvest.

Pre-orders for the available technology are expected to be accepted in fall. For those interested in pricing and availability, Thul recommends reaching out to your local John Deere dealership.

Local farmer sees tractor as possible labor fix

Corbe Anderson farms in Caraway, Ark., and attended the Greenway Technology Showcase to get a firsthand glimpse of the John Deere autonomous tractor in action.

The demonstration piqued his interest in autonomy as a solution to labor shortages on his row crop operation. Anderson said that the steel sector in his region creates major labor challenges for agricultural employers. While the H-2A guest worker program provides some relief, he said it doesn't work in every situation.

"Even though this will not fix all the labor shortages, there are situations where we could use this to do more than one job at one time with less labor," he said of the tractor.

When asked if he had any hesitation about trusting an autonomous tractor, Anderson said he felt confident he could start one up and walk away while it works for him in the field.

"After what I have learned today, I think we can trust it," he said.

Anderson already trusts other technologies on his farm such as pump automation and GPS mapping.

"We have gradually gotten into it over the years," he said of adding various technologies to his operation. Now, he is considering autonomy.

"I am old enough that I am not an electronic geek. For me to say I think autonomy is going to work, well, I probably would not have said that a year or so ago," he concluded.

Ground beef now, or calves in 2026?

BY JOSH MAPLES

Mississippi State University Extension

TIGHT SUPPLIES AND strong demand are driving all types of cattle to record price levels, including cull cows. At local auctions across the southeast, cull cow prices are topping \$160, \$170, \$180, and occasionally even \$190 per cwt depending on type.

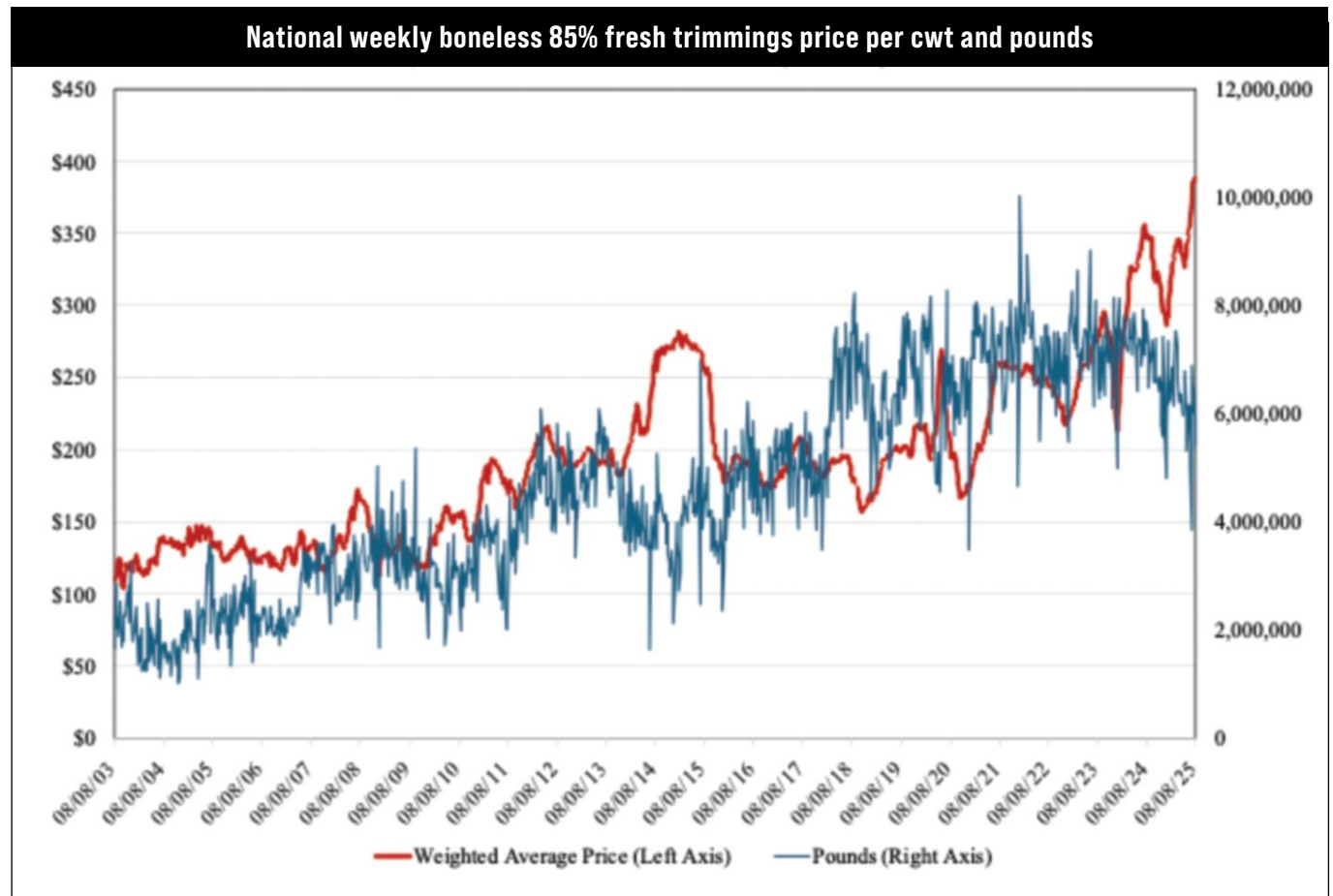
The national direct dressed price for 85 % lean boner cull cows topped \$300 per cwt last week for the first time in history (top chart at right). Ground beef demand has been strong and is the product most closely associated with lean trim from cull cows. Average U.S. retail ground beef prices topped \$6 per pound in June for the first time ever according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The second chart below shows 85 % fresh trimmings price and pounds sold over time. This series is not comprehensive of all trim since it is just looking at formula sales for 85 % trim and not at other %ages or sales type.

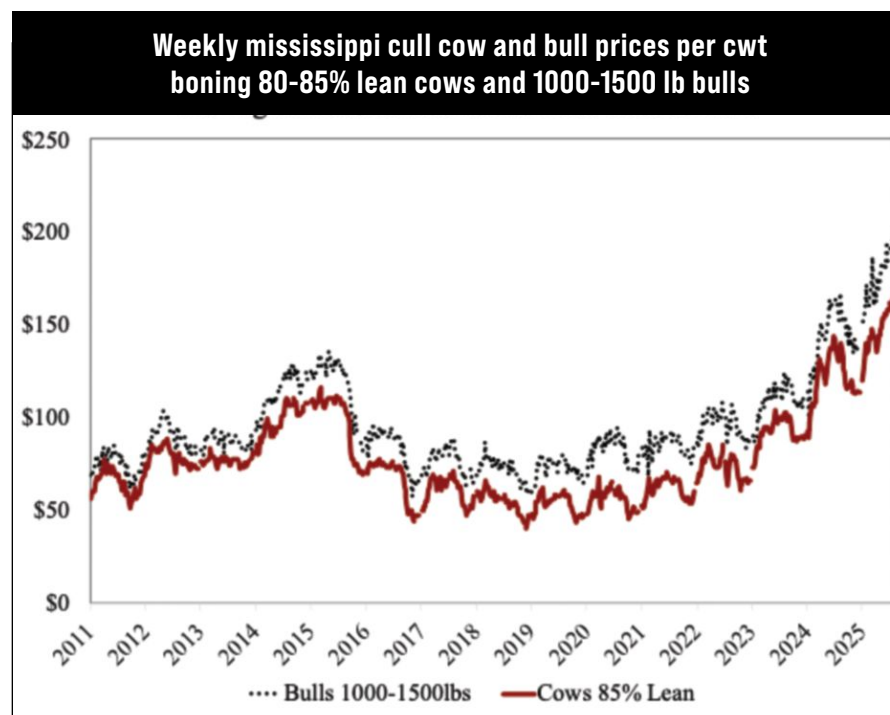
However, the chart is interesting in that it highlights the inverse relationship between price and quantity. The declining availability of 85 % trim over the past year has corresponded with sharp increases in price.

This is driving the sharply higher dressed cow prices and local auction prices for cull cows.

Imports are also a key piece of this puzzle. Beef imports are up sharply this year amid the high U.S. domestic prices. The majority of imports are lean trim that will be mixed with the fattier trim produced by domestic fed steers and heifers to make ground beef. Recent changes in tariffs will have impacts on lean trim. Brazil was the top import source for the first half of 2025, but the



SOURCE: USDA-AMS NATIONAL WEEKLY FORMULATED BONELESS COW BEEF & BEEF TRIMMINGS - FORMULATED SALE



SOURCE: USDA-AMS, MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE

tariff on beef from Brazil jumped to 76 % last week which is sure to lead to significant reductions for as long as the tariff is in place. Meanwhile, the %age of those imports that were lean trim will need to be filled by other import sources or do-

mestic lean trim (i.e. cows and bulls). This is a good example of how tariffs and trade flows can impact domestic prices and supplies.

This all leads to an important discussion about cow herd expansion. Producers

Imports are also a key piece of this puzzle. Beef imports are up sharply this year amid the high U.S. domestic prices. The majority of imports are lean trim that will be mixed with the fattier trim produced by domestic fed steers and heifers to make ground beef. Recent changes in tariffs will have impacts on lean trim.

making culling decisions ahead of winter will be tasked with navigating the value of the cow as a cull cow vs their expected value in producing a calf next year.

As the value of domestic lean trim increases, cull cow prices also increase. There will be some producers who would not have culled cows at \$150 per cwt but will cull cows if they are able to get \$200 per cwt and their expected value of calves in 2026 is unchanged.

These decisions are all interconnected. In the absence of much heifer retention, it is possible that surging cull cow values could slow expansion efforts further.

Sensors can detect Blacklands saltwater intrusion



KNOW WHAT'S IN YOUR WATER: Hyde County Extension Agent Andea Gibbs urges all farmers in the Blacklands to test their water for salinity. JOHN HART

BY JOHN HART

john.hart@farmprogress.com

SALTWATER INTRUSION REMAINS Public Enemy Number One for farmers in coastal North Carolina's Blacklands in the state's Tidewater region. To battle the problem, farmers have turned to water control tools like floodgates, risers, pumps, ditches and canals to remove water from their fields.

Chad Poole, North Carolina State University Extension water resiliency specialist, said these tools do a great job helping farmers deal with saltwater intrusion, but more tools are needed. That's the reason behind his excitement for a new first alert notification system that will allow Blackland farmers to monitor their water and know when a field will be impacted by salinity.

At the Blackland Farm Managers Tour at Green Valley Farms in Columbia Aug. 6, Poole highlighted challenges of saltwater intrusion and how this new notification system works on the farm.

FIRST ALERT NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

NCSU and East Carolina University have teamed up to develop the first alert notification system for farmers across the Blacklands. The system — in its testing phase — first sends a text message to the county agent, who then verifies the data and sends emails or texts to notify growers of problems.

Eventually, growers or landowners will have the option to also receive the text directly from the notification system if they desire.

Poole said the technology provides farmers with a proactive approach to monitor water levels as well as the timing of impact to fields.

The system will allow drainage system salinity measurement so farmers can act to prevent or remove water from the field. It will send a text notification when either salinity levels reach a certain part per thousand or water levels in the drainage systems reach a certain level.

"What happens when the diesel engine runs out of diesel fuel in the middle of the night? How do you know that? With this system, you're going to get that text. Something is wrong; you need to go check that. What if the floodgate doesn't close or the seal is leaking? You can monitor the sa-

linity levels on both sides of that floodgate. It will send a text notification that there is something wrong so you can go check it," Poole said.

TESTING IN PROGRESS

An off-the-shelf system marketed by the Meter Group is already available for farmers to monitor the salinity of their water. Poole says that system costs approximately \$1,200 plus \$200 per year for the data plan needed for real-time mobile alerts.

Poole said ECU is working on a cheaper system that uses LORAN and less expensive sensors. This system is now being tested in Engelhard, while the Meter Group system is being tested in Scranton. He said drainage is the number one way to remove sodium from a field, but the notification system is needed to help farmers do a better job of water management.

"From an irrigation standpoint, if you're going to pump water on a crop, you typically do not want salinity to be above .45 parts per thousand. But fresh water is considered fresh if salinity is less than 1 part per thousand," Poole said at the Blackland field day.

The notification system notifies farmers if the salinity level reaches a dangerous level for crops, so they can act.

To illustrate the challenges of saltwater intrusion, Poole said if you tested a water sample from the ocean at Nags Head, 40 miles from where the field day was held, the salinity level would be 35 parts per thousand.

In June, the average salinity level monitored by the notification system varied between 4 to 4.5 parts per thousand in Scranton and between 15 to 18 parts per thousand in Engelhard — quite a difference.

"Engelhard is sitting on the Pamlico Sound. If you look at the way the bird flies, that's probably less than 15 to 20 miles between Scranton and Engelhard. It's location, location, location. It can be variable and that's why this notification system is so important," Poole said.

"Most of us cut those pumps off in the winter because it's an expense to us. But we are dealing with this salinity year-round. My job as a drainage specialist is to figure out how we can manage those pumps during the winter to maximize the removal of sodium without hurting the water quality downstream in that field in the estuary," Poole said.



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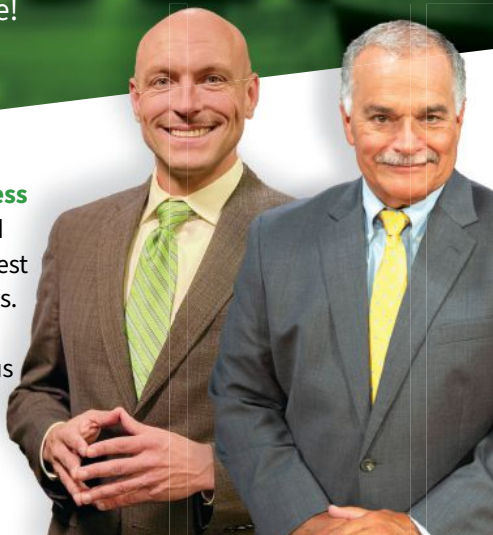
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STOPPING SALTWATER INTRUSION

He emphasized that the primary practice for dealing with saltwater intrusion is drainage. You have to promote water movement through the soil to remove the sodium.

"The only way you can have drainage is to have a deep enough outlet that drainage can occur. The problem in Hyde, Tyrell, Dare, Washington, Pamlico, and other counties is we have water tables right at the

surface due to low elevations and relative sea levels. We don't have sufficient outlets to promote intensive drainage. In order to increase that drainage, we have pumps that provide an unrestricted outlet," Poole said.

"Tide gates are an effective, proactive approach, as long as they are working. We have used pumps to deal with this issue over the years. Now we have this notification system. All of these pieces are there to actively manage the salinity issues going

forward," Poole said.

Hyde County Extension Agent Andrea Gibbs said saltwater intrusion isn't an issue for all parts of the county, but it is becoming problematic beyond Scranton and Engelhard. She urges all Blacklands farmers to actively monitor their water for salinity.

"I have a salinity meter that I can go around and check water for people. But I'm only one person, and I only have one

meter. Even if you think you are safe, check you water for salinity," she urged.

Gibbs pointed out that funds are available through NC State Extension for farmers to sample their water and send samples to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture for a complete analysis. "If you want to send off a water sample, contact your local Extension agent so they can help you with that and get it paid for."

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Heavy rain makes benghal dayflower a 'monsoon' weed

TAILGATE TALK

BY ERIC P. PROSTKO

Contributing Writer

MY COLLEAGUES AND I have been working on Bengal dayflower control since the early 2000s. Despite the effective control data that has been generated, the weed continues to cause major headaches.

This year, Extension county agents have expressed their concern that this might be one of the worst years ever for this Bengal dayflower, especially in counties where it is a relatively newer pest.

Three things are brewing this year that have caused me to have major heartburn

when thinking about Bengal dayflower control today and in the future.

Earlier this year, my colleague Dr. Scott Monfort, UGA Extension peanut agronomist, conducted a grower survey during the winter meeting season. One of the questions he asked was "How many growers are planning on using deep tillage, such as moldboard plow, in 2025?"

Only 38% of the growers surveyed indicated that they were going to plow. In a tough economy, growers reduce costs per acre in any way they can. I completely understand.

But research has shown that deep tillage can be an effective part of a Bengal dayflower management program. I am aware of a couple of long-term reduced tillage

farmers who have been successful in managing Bengal dayflower, but they work harder and smarter in all rotational crops to achieve this goal. Growers who might need to deep-turn only need to do so once every three to five years.

Concerning Bengal dayflower control, Mother Nature has not been cooperative in 2025. Bengal dayflower is a "monsoon" weed. This means that it tends to thrive under wet conditions. Many areas of Georgia had excessive rainfall earlier in the growing season. Also, excessive rainfall delays prevented timely herbicide applications, which reduced the length of residual control.

In June, the USDA/ARS released its annual crop acreage report. 485,000 acres

of field corn were planted in Georgia, up 29% from 2024. Because Bengal dayflower tends to be a later emerging weed, it is often very difficult to control in-season, especially with early spring corn plantings.

However, one of the best strategies for managing Bengal dayflower on the whole farm is to control it after field corn harvest. I would strongly encourage every field corn grower to scout their fields after harvest for the presence of Bengal dayflower.

Split applications, or seven to 10 days apart, of either paraquat or 2,4-D have been the most effective herbicides for post-harvest control of Bengal dayflower. Failure to control Bengal dayflower after field corn harvest will result in significant weed seed-rain that could plague fields for years.

Reductions in deep tillage, above-average rainfall in some areas and increases in field corn acres are likely to contribute to more problems with Bengal dayflower. Growers must be at the top of their game for this weed. It is a serious pest!

As always, good weed hunting!

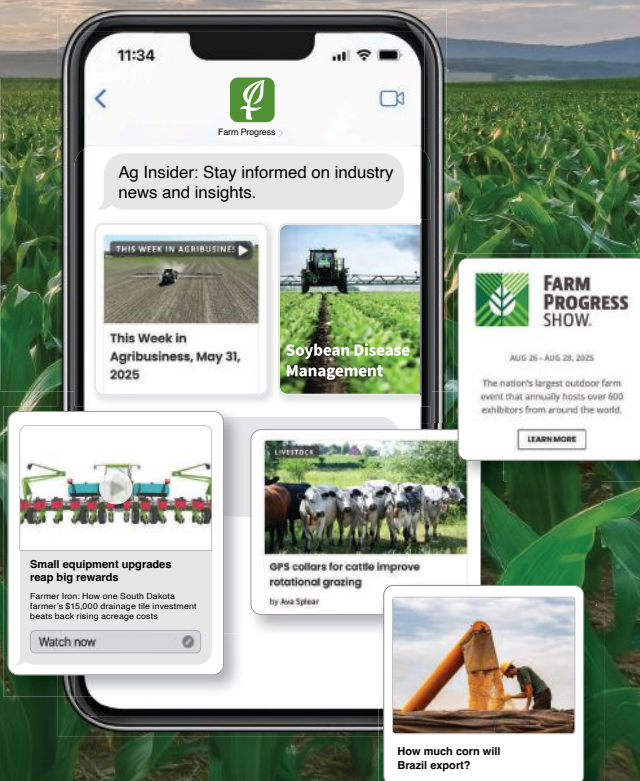
Prostko is a University of Georgia Extension weed specialist.

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 **FarmProgress**

Sterile fly facility planned by USDA to combat NWS

BY JOSHUA BAETHGE
joshua.baethge@farmprogress.com

AGRICULTURE SECRETARY BROOKE Rollins announced Aug. 15 that USDA is moving ahead with plans to build a sterile fly production facility at Moore Air Base near Edinburg, Texas.

When complete, the facility will increase domestic sterile fly production by up to 300 million flies per week to combat the spread of New World screwworm. It will complement a sterile insect dispersal facility set to be completed at the same location later this year. The federal government will invest up to \$750 million in the project.

“This facility will triple our current output and eliminate our sole reliance on Panama and Mexico for sterile fly supply, putting America first,” Rollins said. “It’s a tactical move that ensures we are prepared and not just reactive, which it to date what we have really been working through.”

Rollins made the announcement at a joint press conference with Texas Governor Greg Abbott at the state capitol in Austin. He recently commissioned a new state-level response team to address screwworm in Texas. Abbott warned of “dire economic consequences” for the state and country if action is not taken to further stop the spread of New World screwworm.

THREAT CONTINUES

During a June 18 press conference in Edinburg, Rollins said USDA was working on a design process for a new production facility. At the time, the secretary said it would likely take two or three years for the brand-new facility to be up and running. On Aug. 15, Rollins did not provide an exact timeline for the construction, but said USDA would be “fast-tracking in every possible way.”

This is the latest attempt to stop the spread of New World screwworm. In

June, Rollins announced a five-point plan to combat the pest in the U.S. and in Mexico. That plan included greater coordination with Mexico and between American states, as well as a \$21 billion investment in a Mexico sterile fly facility. Sterile flies have proven to be the most effective tools to combat the invasive insects.

In July, USDA banned livestock imports from Mexico for the third time in eight months after the pest was reported approximately 370 miles from the U.S. border. That ban came only days after Rollins announced the start of a phased reopening of the southern border. USDA also closed the border to livestock trade in November 2024 and May of this year after screwworm were found farther north than previously thought in Mexico. Rollins said the import ban will remain in place for as long as necessary. The secretary said one “silver lining” of the import ban would

be potentially making the U.S. less reliant on non-domestic production to meet the country’s food demands.

FARM GROUPS WELCOME NEWS

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall says Rollins and USDA “answered the call” of cattle producers across the country by establishing the new domestic sterile fly production facility.

“It took decades to eradicate this parasite from within and adjacent to our borders more than a generation ago, and this is a proactive first step,” Duvall said in an Aug. 15 statement.

National Cattlemen’s Beef Association CEO Collin Woodall echoed those sentiments, commending Rollins and President Donald Trump for their “swift action” to combat New World screwworm. He said the new production facility is “vital news” for U.S. cattle producers.



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RAWHIDE

Beef cow slaughter will be '25 inventory driver

BY KENNY BURDINE

University of Kentucky

TWO RECENT USDA reports were much anticipated as they provided further information about the level of beef heifer retention at the national level. Heifers, as a percentage of on-feed inventory, were estimated at 38.1% in the July Cattle-on-Feed report.

This is not a number that suggests widespread retention. And the number of heifers held for beef cow replacement in the mid-year inventory report was estimated at 3.7 million head, a decrease of 100,000 heifers from July 1, 2023.

I wanted to dig into that number a little deeper this week and frame it with the ongoing discussion of beef cow slaughter.

I prefer to think about beef heifer retention as a percentage of beef cow inventory. A higher percentage suggests that the expansion of beef cow numbers is likely in

the future, and a smaller percentage suggests the opposite.

As a percentage of the estimated July 1 beef cow inventory, heifers held for beef cow replacement was 12.9% — down slightly from two years ago and the smallest percentage in the mid-year dataset, which goes back to 1973 (see figure below).

This was yet another sign that heifer retention has been very slow to develop during this cycle.

It is also important to recognize that there is some fluidity in respect to heifer development. All heifers intended for replacement will not become cows and some heifers in the system that are not currently intended for replacement will end up getting bred.

On the other hand, cow slaughter is much more definitive. Cows that have been slaughtered are gone, and all that can change is the pace of beef cow slaughter



RECENT FINDINGS: the number of heifers held for beef cow replacement in the mid-year inventory report was estimated at 3.7 million head, a down 100,000 from July 1, 2023. DS70/BETTY



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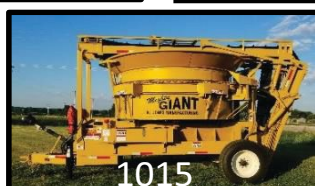
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going forward.

Through the first six months of 2025, beef cow slaughter was down by more than 17% from the first six months of 2024. If that trend continues through the end of the year, nearly 500,000 fewer beef cows would be slaughtered in 2025.

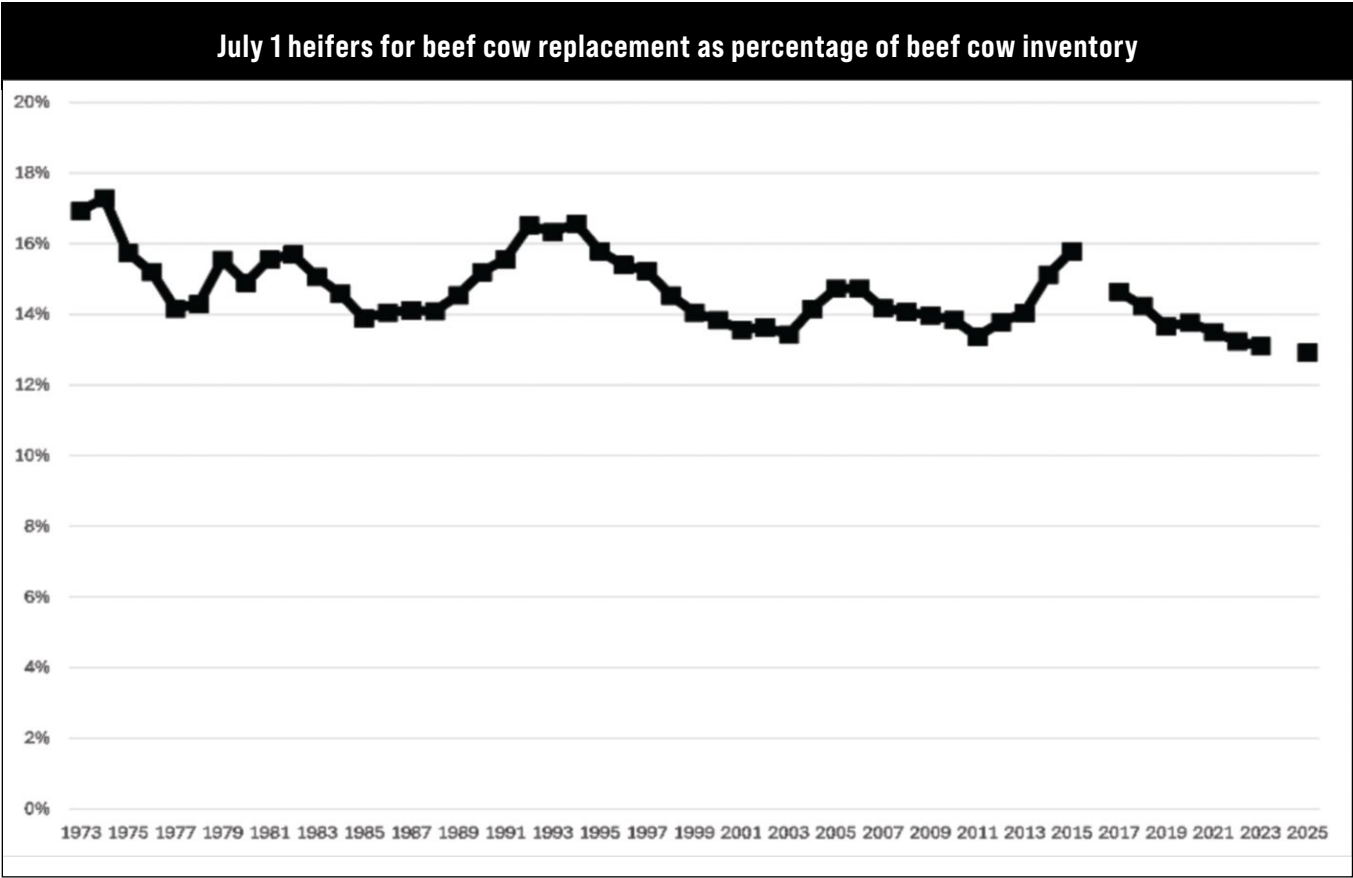
As I write this in early August, there is still plenty of time left in 2025, and potential still exists for the pace of beef cow slaughter to increase.

Up to this point, data suggests that cow-calf operators have generally been holding on to cows longer and selling heifer calves.

However, cull cow prices continue to be strong and attempt to pull more cows into the beef system.

Since the majority of cow-calf operations calve in the spring and wean calves in the fall, the rest of this year will be interesting to watch for beef cow harvest patterns.

I still expect a slight increase in beef cow inventory to start 2026, but increase's significance will be determined by the pace of beef cow slaughter for the balance of 2025.





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CATALOG & VIDEOS



Record beef prices persist as U.S. cattle herd stays low

BY ADAM RUSSELL

AgriLife Media, Texas AgriLife

CONSTRAINED CATTLE SUPPLIES and strong beef demand continue to fuel record prices at all levels of the U.S. beef market — from sale barns to grocery aisles, said Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service experts.

Jason Cleere, AgriLife Extension statewide beef cattle, Bryan-College Station, said cow-calf producers are realizing strong calf sale prices due to strong consumer demand for beef and low cattle supplies.

The national cattle herd continues to hover at historically low numbers following bouts of drought across major beef-producing states, including back-to-back years of extreme drought across Texas. The national beef herd hit a 73-year low in January 2024 at 28.2 million head. Beef herd numbers have increased slightly to 28.7 million head, according to the USDA July cattle inventory report, but cow-calf prices continue

to reach new heights.

Cleere said feeding cattle to heavier weights has helped make up for lower cattle numbers, but beef production is down year over year overall. He said the herd size coupled with strong consumer demand at the retail level has continued to fuel historically high prices for cow-calf producers.

“Retail prices are high, but there is still strong consumer demand,” Cleere said. “On the other end of production, you have ranchers capitalizing on record calf prices and asking, ‘How long are these high calf prices going to last?’”

COW-CALF BIOLOGY WEIGH ON BEEF MARKET

David Anderson, AgriLife Extension economist, Bryan-College Station, said low herd numbers and fewer market-ready calves are fueling record-high prices at all levels of the beef market.

“We’ve got record-high calf prices and record-high fed cattle prices, and that is fu-

eling record-high beef prices on the wholesale and retail side,” he said. “Beef supplies have been particularly low since April, while the demand from meatpackers and, ultimately, consumers has been strong.”

Nationally, Anderson said 300- to 400-pound calves were averaging \$4.67 per pound, while 500- to 600-pound calves were bringing \$4.17 per pound on average. Localized sale prices have been even higher.

A weekly price-trend report by Jason Banta, AgriLife Extension beef cattle specialist, Overton, shows the average high price reported by six Central and East Texas auctions was \$5.25 per pound for 300- to 400-pound calves and \$4.70 per pound for 500- to 600-pound calves.

Anderson said the present market is also a good snapshot of how the dynamics of the beef production cycle can influence supply and prices throughout the year.

Springtime is calving time for most cattle

operations, he said. Those spring-born calves will go to auction in the fall. That influx of supply tends to create a price low point for the year, whereas fall- and winter-born calves are hitting the market through spring and summer.

MARGINS IMPROVE FOR TEXAS RANCHERS

The USDA Economic Research Service estimated the value of U.S. beef cattle and calf production at more than \$83 billion in 2024. Record calf prices have been “tremendous” for Texas cattle producers who endured years of drought and high input costs, Anderson said.

Cleere said margins for cow-calf producers have improved as grazing around the state improved and input costs fell some. Ranchers are holding back replacement heifers, but better margins continue to incentivize selling those future calf-producing cows at rates that do not signal broader growth of the Texas or U.S. herd.

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SPREAD-ALL

10 reasons to stop making hay

BY LINDA GEIST

LINNEUS, MO. – Missouri ranks eighth in the nation in hay production, producing 4.83 million tons per year, according to the Missouri Department of Agriculture. Hay is a major feed for beef production and other livestock industries in Missouri.

“Despite the vastness of the hay industry, making hay can be an indicator of an unprofitable cow-calf enterprise,” says University of Missouri Extension state forage specialist Carson Roberts. “Every measure to improve profit margins should be taken to capitalize on the record-breaking cattle prices.”

There is a consensus that making your own hay is the cheapest way to feed cattle through the winter, Roberts says. “This couldn’t be further from the truth. Hay is expensive to make, expensive to feed.”

Roberts offers 10 key reasons why you should quit making hay:

1. Skyrocketing equipment costs.

Inflation on machinery has outpaced cattle inflation over the past 50 years by a ratio of 10-to-1. In the 1970s, it only took 14 500-pound weaned calves to purchase a new round baler. Today, even with record prices, it takes 41 of the same calves to pay for a new baler.

2. Overequipped farms. A farm’s size should reflect the amount of equipment owned. Nearly all farms in Missouri with fewer than 400 cows would be more profitable if they simply sold the haying equipment and bought hay, says Roberts.

3. Haying takes time. Your most valuable resource is time. Roberts says he sees too many producers spending their day doing \$15 per hour work making hay when they should be doing \$30-\$100 per hour work such as marketing, education, finance, improving efficiency and improving pasture.

4. Variable forage quality. How often does the hay crop get rained on? How often does harvest get delayed, thus reducing forage

quality? With purchased hay, you can use a hay test to have complete control over forage quality. “You can 100% control the quality of the hay you purchase. You cannot always control the quality of hay you make,” says Roberts.

5. Haying removes nutrients. In general, 1 ton of fescue hay will remove 32 pounds of nitrogen, 12 pounds of phosphorus and 45 pounds of potassium, plus a whole suite of micronutrients. This puts the fertilizer value of hay at right around \$72 per ton, he says.

6. Profitable alternatives. If you didn’t make hay, what could you do instead? Custom grazing, stockers or adding value to home-raised cattle by grazing excess spring-time forage will often pay more per acre than producing hay. Preliminary MU research estimates that a 2025 stocker enterprise can make \$200 more per acre than a hay crop.

7. Labor shortages. “It’s hard to find good help nowadays,” says Roberts. “Even if you can find help, it can be very expensive. Most

hardworking young people are interested in making money, and they expect to be compensated for their marketplace value.”

8. Oversupply of hay. The past two years have brought good spring rains and good-yielding hay crops. This, coupled with a record low number of cattle, means hay is cheaper than usual.

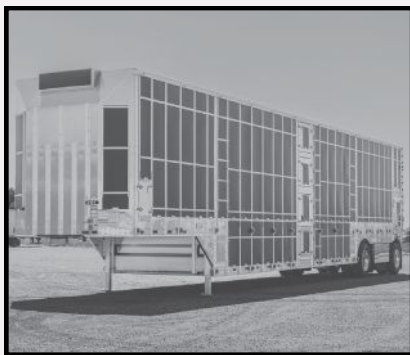
9. Soil degradation. Next to tillage, haying is the easiest way to degrade the soil. Carbon is an essential part of soil function, so removing all the aboveground carbon sends the soil in a downward spiral.

10. Cheap winter feeding strategies. Viable alternatives like milo grazing and stockpiled fescue reduce winter feeding costs by more than half. Roberts says he often hears people say, “Reducing hay sounds great, but you can’t starve weight onto a cow.” This sentiment is true, Roberts says. So why would you insist on feeding hay when stockpiled milo or tall fescue is often as good or better in forage quality than the average bale of fescue? Furthermore, these stockpiled forages can be produced for a fraction of the price.

Linda Geist is sr. strategic communications consultant at the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, MU.



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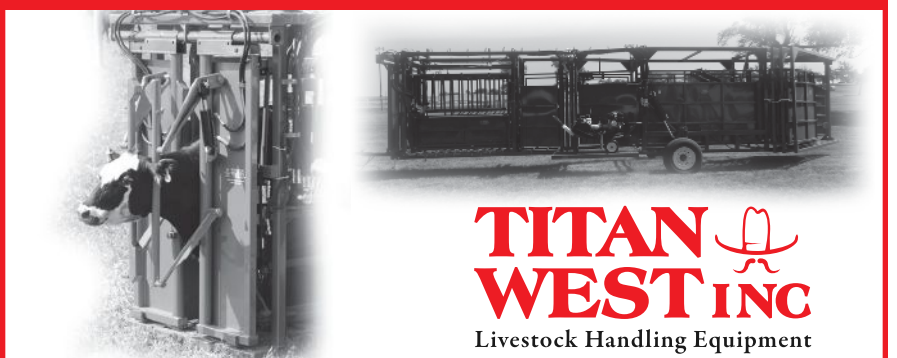
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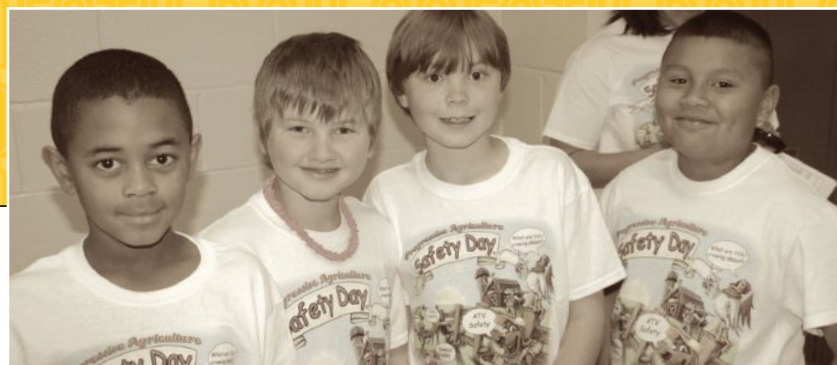
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