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Sweet Potato Crop Update

Tara Smith, Assistant Professor and Sweet Potato Specialist, LSU AgCenter

Louisiana producers are glad to have the 2008 crop behind them and are looking forward to the new season. As indicated in the last issue, the 2008 harvest season was met with disastrous weather conditions, which resulted in excessive losses across the state. Some areas, particularly those in southwest production areas, were spared the brunt of two September hurricanes but the majority Louisiana's sweet potato acreage received from 15-40+ inches of rain during August and September.

Overall yield loss in the state is estimated at just under 50%. Losses in revenue due to yield and quality loss combined are in excess of 70%. Packout percentage across the state has been variable but ranged from 25-55% in affected areas during the Thanksgiving and Christmas packing periods. Louisiana producers with remaining crop supply continue to pack and ship their crop.

Last year did have a few bright spots to reflect on. The Evangeline variety made its commercial debut and performed quite well given the extreme circumstances. In saturated fields, this variety

held up better than Beauregard and thus far has remained sound in storage. Yields of this variety varied, but most producers indicated that Evangeline yielded within 50 bushels \pm of Beauregard. Hopefully 2009 will afford an opportunity to evaluate Evangeline's yield and quality potential in the absence of two major hurricanes.

Plants beds, as mentioned in previous communication, remain the weak spot for Evangeline. Plant production is less than that of Beauregard, and Evangeline is more susceptible to sclerotial blight compared to Beauregard. Researchers intend to evaluate fungicide options to address this issue this spring and are also investigating methods to boost sprout production in the variety.

On another note, the LSU AgCenter held a field day on August 14. The field day was well attended by producers and industry personnel. Several researchers provided updates on crop production, breeding, disease, insect and weed management research. I would like to thank everyone who participated in the field day, and we look forward to future opportunities to network and share information with producers.

In closing, I would like to mention the 2009 National Sweet Potato Council Convention. The meeting will be held in Baton Rouge, January 25-27. The planning committee has diligently worked to assemble an informative and entertaining convention. Please make plans to attend. The meeting is a great opportunity to network and communicate with your fellow producers, along with producers and industry representatives across the United States. For more information, see the industry update section.

I have enjoyed working with all of you during the 2008 season. I hope everyone had a happy holiday season and will have a good New Year.

Foundation Seed Update
Tara Smith

Similar to most commercial production areas, the 2008 a portion of the foundation seed crop was damaged by the September hurricanes. Approximately 10 acres of foundation seed were not harvested or attained significant yield loss, due to breakdown and rotting of roots in the field. As a result, the seed supply is reduced compared to previous years. With that said, all of the stored seed appears sound and is holding up well in storage.

Letters were mailed out to producers and county agents before Thanksgiving, and at present, a large amount of Beauregard and Evangeline seed remains available. Seed allocation will proceed similar to last year. Once all of the

orders have been received (deadline is January 15), available seed will be allocated and producers will be notified about their orders. Orders received after January 15 will be handled on a first-come first-served basis. If you have any questions concerning the foundation seed program, please call Tara Smith at the Sweet Potato Research Station (318-435-2155).

2008 Photo Gallery
A few images from the 2008 production season.



Evangeline Plant Beds:
Garber Farms 2008



Seedling Evaluation, Sweet
Potato Research Station: 2008



Transplanting Thornhill Farms:
2008



05-111 Breeding Line: 2008



Evangeline post-hurricanes



LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato
Research Station Field Day

**Sweet Potatoes: A
Powerhouse of Nutrition**
*Terri Crawford M.S. Family
and Consumer Sciences
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The sweet potato may be one of nature's most delicious, versatile and nutritious secrets...until now. Sweet potatoes have been labeled as an important source of nutrition. After extensive research, the Center for Science in the Public Interest ranked the sweet potato as the most nutritious vegetable,

considerably higher in nutrition than even spinach and broccoli. Of all the veggies studied by the CSPI, the sweet potato received a nutritional value rating of 184. The next highest rating earned by any vegetable was 83.

The versatile sweet potato is ideal fare for the health conscious food consumer. With the ever-growing interest in health and natural foods, the sweet potato is quickly finding its place in many families' weekly diets year-round. The sweet potato blends well with herbs, spices and flavorings producing delicious dishes of all types. From processed baby foods to main dishes, casseroles, salads, breads and desserts, sweet potatoes add valuable, appetizing nutrients and color to any meal and at an economical price.

One baked sweet potato (3 1/2 ounce serving) provides more than 8,800 International Units of Vitamin A or about twice the recommended daily allowance, yet it contains only 141 calories, making it valuable for the weight watcher. This nutritious vegetable provides 42% of the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for Vitamin C, 6% of the RDA for calcium, 10% of the RDA for iron and 8% of the RDA for thiamine for healthy adults. It is low in sodium and is a good source of fiber. A complex carbohydrate food source, it provides beta carotene, which may be a factor in reducing the risk of certain cancers.

With the availability of sweet potatoes year-round, it is important to know how to

select the best quality during any time of the year. When buying fresh sweet potatoes, choose firm, fairly well-shaped ones. The skin should be even in color and free of major blemishes. Ideally, sweet potatoes should be used within a week or two; however, they may be stored up to one month in a pantry. Sweet potatoes should not be refrigerated unless already cooked because storage at low temperatures can cause a loss of flavor. Canned sweet potatoes are always available at your local grocery store and can be substituted for fresh ones in any recipe. You can even find sweet potatoes in the frozen food section of the grocery store now.

Sweet potatoes can be baked, boiled, fried, broiled, canned or frozen. They can also be cooked in the microwave oven. Before cooking sweet potatoes, scrub skin and trim off any bruised or woody portions.

Market Outlook *Tara Smith*

The market has been steady and prices remained stable through the Thanksgiving and Christmas movements. Wayne Garber, a producer and broker with Garber Farms in Iota, La. indicated that "Louisiana's supply is short as we move into the New Year, and it is likely that the Louisiana supply will be exhausted by Easter."

It is not clear at this time how the price will respond to the reduced supply. The crop losses experienced in 2008

definitely created a different marketing environment for our brokers and shippers. Producers and shippers are dealing with the reduced supply and are looking ahead to the 2009 crop year. The current price received to the grower in Louisiana ranges from \$14.00-\$14.50 per 40-lb box for U.S. No. 1 grade sweet potatoes.

Industry News

2009 National Sweet Potato Council Convention: January 25-27

The National Sweet Potato Council will hold its annual convention in Baton Rouge this year at the Hilton Capital Center in downtown Baton Rouge. Louisiana is making plans for an informative and entertaining meeting. Reservations can be made by calling (225) 344-5866. Please make plans to attend and...*"Rendezvous on the Bayou."*

Freeman Retires; Deshotel to Assume Sweet Potato Responsibilities in Avoyelles Parish

Ernest Freeman, county agent in Avoyelles Parish, retired after a long and dedicated career with the LSU AgCenter and Southern University. Freeman worked closely with the sweet potato industry in Avoyelles Parish for several years and we wish him well in his retirement.

Vince Deshotel, county agent in St. Landry parish will assume sweet potato

responsibilities for Avoyelles parish. Deshotel will continue to work with St. Landry and Evangeline parish producers and looks forward to working in the Avoyelles production area.

Survey mailed out to U.S. Sweet Potato Producers

A survey was mailed out in late December to U.S. sweet potato producers. The survey is a critical first step in identifying key issues affecting producers. Information gathered from the survey will assist research and extension personnel across the country in addressing these concerns. The information is a critical first step to document industry involvement in our programming efforts. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. Your assistance is greatly appreciated. A focus group session will be held during the National Sweet Potato Convention to discuss results of the survey.

Recipe of the Day

Ham and Sweet Potato Pot Pie with Pecan Crust

The perfect comfort meal that will please the family with every bite.

Ingredients:

1 cup chopped onion
2 cups cubed sweet potatoes or 2 (15-ounce) cans sweet potatoes, drained and cubed
2 cups canned chicken broth, divided
1/2 cup all purpose flour
1 cup skim milk
2 cups cubed cooked ham
1 9-inch refrigerated pie crust
1/2 cup finely chopped pecans

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large pot coated with nonstick cooking spray, sauté the onion over a medium-high heat for 5 minutes. Add fresh* sweet potatoes and 2/3 cup chicken broth. Bring mixture to a boil and simmer over medium heat for 10 to 15 minutes or until sweet potatoes are tender. (If using canned yams, add them and 2/3 cup chicken broth to sautéed onions; heat thoroughly.) Add flour, stirring and gradually add milk stirring until well combines. Add ham, bring to a boil and then transfer mixture to a 9- x 9-inch baking dish coated with nonstick cooking spray. If mixture is too thick, add

more broth or milk. Unfold crust and sprinkle pecans on one side, fold, and roll with rolling pin pressing pecans into crust. Spread pecan crust on top of mixture and bake for 30 minutes or until crust is brown.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

*Canned sweet potatoes are precooked.

www.sweetpotato.org

LSU AgCenter Extension personnel are available to assist you with all of your crop needs. Please call on us if we can be of assistance.

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