

Louisiana Sweet Potato News



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Sweet Potato Crop Update

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

Spring fever is in the air and the 2007 production season is just around the corner. In traveling around the state in recent weeks I have witnessed an industry eager to embrace a new year and hopefully recoup some of the losses experienced in 2006. Temperatures have increased in recent weeks and producers are anxiously waiting to begin their bedding operations. Several operations have already begun in south Louisiana. Based on initial reports and conversations with producers around the state, acreage will be short of that planted in 2006. Several factors including the adverse weather conditions experienced in 2006 and labor availability are cited as reasons for the reduction. On a positive note a few growers are increasing their acreage and the overall scope of their operations. Producers as a whole are optimistic about the future of the industry and some are improving or expanding their existing operations with new storage facilities

and packinglines. Included below are a few thoughts on plant beds as you begin the 2007 production season.

Plant bed management is critical, and proper fertilization, insect and disease management are important initially. Transplant vigor, health and establishment at time of planting, set the stage for ultimate yields realized at harvest. Initially plant beds should be fertilized with a complete fertilizer, such as 13:13:13 or 8:24:24 at a rate of ca. 1 lb/ 100 sq. ft. of plant bed or 300-400 lb/A. Additional ammonium nitrate may be applied after the first cutting. Zinc (9 % chelated), can also be applied at 1 qt/acre, one-two weeks before cutting plants. Recent research suggests that spacing roots further apart in plant beds may increase transplant girth and the number of nodes present on the transplants.

Pay particular attention to aphids, whiteflies, and early season cucumber beetles in plant beds. If cucumber beetles are present in plant beds before cutting, apply a labeled foliar insecticide

along with the foliar zinc application. Producers in south Louisiana should manage sweetpotato weevils in plant beds according to the mandatory spray program. Also keep in mind, that plants should be cut and not pulled from plant beds. Seed potatoes should also be treated with Botran® and / or Mertect® fungicides according to label directions. Please contact us with questions or for additional information on managing sweet potato plant beds.

Preplant Soil Insecticides **Tara Smith**

I have received several questions and comments regarding preplant soil insecticides in recent months. Experiments conducted in 2006 at two locations in Louisiana indicate that damage from soil insects can be reduced 40-70 % when labeled preplant soil insecticides are applied properly and in a timely manner relative to planting. Brigade® (bifenthrin) previously labeled as Capture®, Lorsban® (chlorpyrifos), and Mocap® (ethoprop) are labeled for use on sweet potatoes in Louisiana to manage soil insects. If you traditionally have a problem with white grubs or whitefringed beetles, you should use Brigade or Mocap. Lorsban is not labeled for white grub or whitefringed beetle suppression. To achieve

optimum results from these chemicals, it is important that you apply them as close to transplanting as possible in accordance with label directions. Brigade® (bifenthrin) has performed consistently in experimental trials when applied as an in-furrow spray or T-band spray at planting. Preplant applications made 5-6 weeks prior to transplant should not be expected to provide the same level of residual control as those applied closer to planting. An insect scouting and foliar insecticide spray program should begin within 1-2 weeks following transplant to manage the adult stages of various soil insects.

Nematodes and Technology: Spying on an Invisible Pest

*Gene Burris, Professor,
Northeast Research Station,
LSU AgCenter*

In 2001, teams of LSU AgCenter scientists launched a project to explore the use of GPS technologies to manage nematodes that infest soils in Louisiana. Cotton and sweet potato fields were included in the studies. The justification for these efforts was that management strategies (i.e. fertility management, soil insecticide application, irrigation) can be severely disrupted by nematodes; also control costs may be excessive since nematode treatments are usually applied uniformly across

fields instead of on a site-specific basis.

With the help of a grant from the EPA, the research teams initial efforts was to expand its efforts to provide better knowledge of plant parasitic nematode distributions and densities. Preliminary data was taken by sampling on 1-acre grids. From these samples, soil texture and nematode population densities were determined. The grid data was used to segregate fields into zones characterized by differences in soil texture and to show the relationship of plant parasitic nematodes within different soil zones.

Development of soil zones was accomplished using a Veris mapping cart that measures the electrical conductivity of soils, which correlates with soil texture. Topography data was also collected and stored for use in analysis of results.

Although the exact relationship of clay content and nematode populations is not known, the data collected by the LSU AgCenter team suggest that there is a threshold between 15 and 20% clay content beyond which nematode populations rarely occur at damaging levels. The data indicated that soil electrical conductivity measurements taken with the Veris Cart could be effectively used in the field to predict clay content and zones having

the highest probability of supporting damaging levels of nematodes. Therefore, use of soil electrical conductivity measurements and elevation may assist in the analysis of nematodes, and could lead to site-specific management instead of whole field application.

In the sweet potato fields on the Macon Ridge, differences in distribution patterns exist in comparison to nematodes found in the alluvial delta soils and the prevalent species is usually *reniform*, whereas root-knot is often the most prevalent in the delta. Many fields have been found to contain both species of nematode. These technological developments do not eliminate the need for using thorough and routine sampling but do enhance our knowledge base about these pests. More studies are planned for 2007. For those individuals that have loaned their fields for this type analysis, we appreciate your cooperation.

Market Outlook

Tara Smith

The past two months have seen steady movement of the 2006 crop. The current supply is a reflection of adverse weather conditions encountered during the 2006 harvest. As of February 22, 2007 the FOB price for a cured 40# box of U.S. #1's in Louisiana was

\$16-16.50. This price reflects an increase that came just after the first of the year. The current prices on other marketable grades range from \$8 -12. The market situation is considered firm and is a direct reflection of the tight supply. Brokers indicate that the longevity of the current supply will depend on Easter related shipments. Demand will increase around Easter and is likely to slack off as the summer months approach. Optimistically speaking Louisiana's supply will hold out until June, but movement over the next couple of months will better dictate the long term forecast.

New Variety, "Evangeline" Released in 2007

*Don Labonte, Professor,
School of Plant,
Environmental and Soil
Science, LSU AgCenter*

A new sweet potato variety, "Evangeline", was released by the LSU AgCenter in February. In 26 trials to date, Evangeline has been a consistent performer. The yield and overall quality of this sweet potato in small plot studies has been comparable to Beauregard. Evangeline does seem to produce fewer jumbos than Beauregard, so potentially, this could translate into a few more U.S. # 1's for producers. Growers behind

on harvest may have more time to still capture #1 grade instead of jumbo grade. Evangeline has an excellent quality as a baked and canned product. This variety is noticeably sweeter than Beauregard coming out of the ground. The sugar content of the two cultivars is different, with Evangeline having more sucrose, thus the sweeter taste. The additional sucrose also increases the palatability of this sweet potato as a microwaved product. We have also found that the texture, flavor and overall quality of Evangeline after baking do not appear compromised when roots are harvested under adverse conditions (water stress).

A couple of things to note: Evangeline does not appear as resilient as Beauregard, and presprouting of seed potatoes is encouraged and recommended. Plant production has been decreased in some experimental plots in comparison to Beauregard. Presprouting and taking care not to bed too deeply should be considered with Evangeline.

Limited quantities of Evangeline seed will be available in 2007. The LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station, Chase, LA is currently increasing virus-tested Evangeline plants in the greenhouse

with the intention of producing several acres of virus-tested foundation seed at the station in 2007. Please contact us if you have questions regarding 'Evangeline' or any other aspects of the sweet potato breeding and foundation seed programs.

Industry News

Brian Breaux: Distinguished Service Award Winner LSPA 2007

Brian Breaux, Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, is the 2007 recipient of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Association Distinguished Service Award. Brian was presented the award at the 70th annual Louisiana Sweet Potato Association State Meeting, which was held in Ville Platte, LA on January 17. Brian has supported the sweet potato industry in our state for several years. He has tirelessly worked with growers on labor reform and crop insurance issues. He is well deserving of this honor. Congratulations Brian!!!



Mid-South Agricultural Labor Seminar: March 6th

The mid-south Agricultural labor Seminar will be held in Baton Rouge, LA on March

6, 2007. The seminar will begin at 8:45 A.M. This seminar will provide you with legal advice on how to avoid State and Federal labor law violations and law suits. Sweet potato producers who employ domestic and foreign workers will benefit from this seminar. For more information contact: Brian Breaux, Louisiana Farm Bureau, 225-922-6210.

Special Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation Advisory Meeting: March 8th Crop Insurance

The Risk Management Office has informed the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation that they have halted the development of a pack out policy for sweet potatoes. There are several other policy options being examined. Your input and thoughts are critical in developing a "useful" and beneficial crop insurance policy for the sweet potato industry in our state.

A meeting will be held to discuss the above mentioned issues at the West Carroll Extension office on March 8, 2007 at 9:30 A.M. Brian Breaux and the Louisiana Farm Bureau Advisory Board will be present at this meeting. This is an excellent opportunity for you to express your concerns and provide input in developing a new and beneficial policy.

Spring Meeting of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission

The next meeting of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission will be held 10:00 A.M. April 17, 2007 at the Cottonport Bank in Mansura, LA

Capture® Insecticide = Brigade® in 2007

Capture insecticide has received a full label for sweet potato in 2007. The label will however be under the trade name "Brigade". The formulation and rates will remain the same.

Sandea® Herbicide

Sandea herbicide will not be labeled for use on sweet potato in Louisiana, 2007. For questions concerning this matter, please contact Tara Smith.

Recipe of the Day

Sweet Potato Smoothie Recipe

www.soulfoodandsoutherncooking.com

2 medium sweet potatoes (about 2 cups)
2 to 2 1/2 cups water
1 tablespoons brown rice syrup
1 tablespoon dark brown sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla flavoring
1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon butterscotch flavoring
2 teaspoons creamy peanut butter, without nuts
2 ice cubes, optional

Bake sweet potatoes until tender. Let the potatoes cool before peeling. Peel skins away from sweet potatoes.

Add peeled potatoes and the remaining ingredients to the blender and blend well. Blend to creamy consistency and serve warm or chilled (add ice cubes).

377 Calories, 34g Carbs, 2.7g Fat, 14.6g Protein

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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