

Louisiana Sweet Potato News



June 2008

Vol. 3, No. 2

In This Issue:

- **Sweet Potato Crop Update**
- **Early Season Scouting**
- **National Sweet Potato Council Convention: 'Rendezvous on the Bayou'**
- **Nitrogen Fertilization Management**
- **LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station Field Day**
- **Market Outlook**
- **Variety Update**
- **Industry News**
- **Fun Facts**

Sweet Potato Crop Update

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

The sweet potato planting season is well under way. Producers began planting in early May, but have been delayed by recent and frequent rainfall. Producers across the state, received between 5 and 10 inches of rainfall during the month of May. Most producers have gotten back on schedule and as of June 1st, approximately 40-50% of the 2008 crop was in the ground. Weather and labor force permitting; the majority of the crop should be planted by June 15th. Initial plantings have really taken off in recent weeks and plant stands are solid in most locations.

Reports on plant production in plant beds and observations of plant beds across the state have been variable. Most are reporting great plant production in Beauregard beds and are pleased with the number of plants they are harvesting off of the first cutting. Evangeline beds have also done well in many locations. However, plant production and sprouting have been sporadic in a few locations

and the Evangeline beds are a little behind Beauregard in terms of earliness this year. The Evangeline beds have come on strong in the last few weeks, however, and producers are optimistic that they will be able to get a second cutting from those beds prior to completing planting.

South Louisiana producers are a little further along in the planting window, as is traditionally the case. Todd Cullen, a 150 acre producer in Avoyelles Parish, indicated that he planned to complete planting on June 2. "We have a good stand, for the most part, and we are almost ready to lay-by our first planting." Blaine Joubert, a 150 acre producer in St. Landry Parish, is not far behind Mr. Cullen. Mr. Joubert indicated that he had 30 acres left to plant. "We have a good stand, we were wet for awhile and delayed a couple of times during planting, but everything is looking good so far." Ted McDermott, a 500 acre producer in West Carroll Parish had about 1/3 of his crop planted by June 2, and expected to be finished by June 15, barring any unforeseen circumstances.

Mr. McDermott commented that “soil moisture is still adequate, but we have some dry clods on the soil surface. A few of the plants are starting to burn, so we are watering right behind the transplanted, to help our stand.”

Louisiana producers are off to another good start in 2008. 2007 was a good year for most of the industry and I am optimistic that 2008 will turn out the same way. Please contact me if you have any issues or questions regarding your 2008 crop.

Early Season Scouting *Tara Smith*

With approximately 50% of this year's crop planted it is a good time to start monitoring and scouting your production fields. Routine visits to production fields by producers and/or crop consultants are necessary to identify early season insect problems and nutrient deficiencies that may possibly be corrected with timely insecticide applications and foliar/sidedress applications of fertilizers. Scouting for adult insects (cucumber beetles, white fringed beetles, sweetpotato weevils, flea beetles) should begin soon after transplant, within 2 weeks of transplanting, and should continue on a weekly basis. Cucumber beetles were the most common insect scouted in sweet potato

fields in 2007. The treatment threshold for these insects is 2 beetles / 100 sweeps. Please visit our web site: www.lsuagcenter.com and access the Sweet Potato Research Station webpage for more information concerning management options and recommendations for your crop, including ***insect and weed management guides***. If you have questions or concerns about your crop please contact your local extension agent and/or Tara Smith with questions.

Louisiana Hosts National Sweet Potato Council Meeting: January 2009 *Tara Smith*

Come one come all for an event we hope you won't soon forget. Plan to '***Rendezvous on the Bayou***' in Baton Rouge, La. at the 2009 National Sweet Potato Council Convention. Just like our famous cuisine, Louisiana has a rich and colorful cultural and political history that is firmly “rooted” in Baton Rouge. The meeting will be held in the newly restored Hilton Capital Center Hotel located adjacent to the Mississippi River, in thriving downtown Baton Rouge, La. The Hilton Capital Center offers guests an opportunity to experience the history and elegance of Louisiana, while also enjoying several popular local attractions. The hotel offers a

phenomenal view of the mighty Mississippi River and is just minutes away from several area attractions, including: the Shaw Center for the Arts, the Louisiana Museum, the Louisiana Capital, Louisiana State University, casinos and numerous restaurants. In addition, Baton Rouge is only a short drive from St. Francisville, La., which is home to several antebellum historical homes and antique shops.

Louisiana is gearing up for an entertaining and informative meeting and we hope that all of you will be able to join us. We are developing a great educational program that will appeal to all those associated with the industry. Horticultural research updates, policy and labor information and a presentation by a producer, featuring a Louisiana sweet potato operation are just a few topics currently on the agenda.

More complete information on registration, sponsorship, program and agenda updates and exhibitor opportunities can be found on the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission website (www.sweetpotato.org) in the near future. If you have any questions concerning the 2009 convention, please contact Mark Fields, president of the 2009 convention mfields@allencanning.com or Tara Smith

tsmith@agctr.lsu.edu, with the LSU AgCenter.

Nitrogen Fertilization Management

Arthur Villordon, Assoc. Professor, Sweet Potato Research Station, LSU AgCenter

We have conducted several studies in recent years, which evaluated the proper amount and timing of nitrogen fertilizer in sweet potato production fields. Our data have consistently shown that 40-45 lbs per acre of nitrogen results in optimum yield compared to higher rates, which can often negatively affect yield. Cumulative observations in field plots (2003-2005), suggests that fertilizer nitrogen use efficiency, as well as yield, can be optimized by splitting or sidedressing fertilizer N at 21-28 DAT (days after transplant). In addition, late season applications (40 and 42 DAT) led to reductions in U.S. No. 1 yield in field trials.

Figure 1. Demonstrates the response of sweet potato to fertilizer timing in 2 field tests conducted in 2003 at the Sweet Potato Research Station. Splitting (22.5 lbs preplant and 22.5 lbs sidedress) or sidedressing nitrogen fertilizer at 21 or 28 DAT produced more U.S. No. 1's than did the preplant application of N. Results

from 2004 and 2005 field studies were similar.

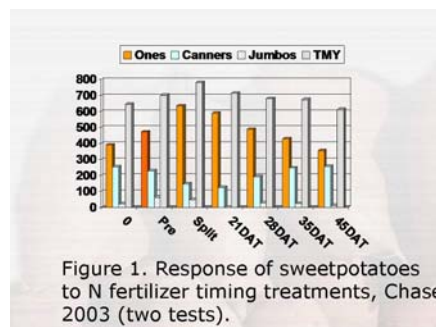


Figure 1. Response of sweetpotatoes to N fertilizer timing treatments, Chase 2003 (two tests).

More recent studies conducted in 2007 tracked labeled nitrogen from the plant beds to harvest. Results from this study suggest an interaction between bed-applied nitrogen and field-applied nitrogen. Under conditions of adequate field N, transplants appeared to have utilized both bed-applied and field-applied N. Plots that received this treatment had good storage root set. When excessive N was applied, virtually no field bed N was recovered in storage root samples. Plots that received excessive N had very poor root set. These data support our initial findings which suggest that application of too much nitrogen in the early stages can be detrimental for root initiation and subsequent growth. All of our studies conducted to date suggest that 45 lbs per acre of nitrogen fertilizer, applied as a split or sidedress application results in optimum yield performance compared to 45 lbs applied

preplant or higher rates applied as a preplant, split, or sidedress application. However, the beneficial effects of these nitrogen management approaches can be negated when transplants are exposed to conditions of stress, like severe moisture deficit or flooding especially during the critical transplant establishment stage.

LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station Field Day

Tara Smith

The LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station field day will be held on Thursday, August 14, 2008. The field day will begin at 8 a.m. with registration and opening comments. The field tour will begin around 9 a.m. The foundation seed program and numerous research programs will be highlighted during the tour. We will have lunch following the tour. All of those interested in sweet potato production are invited and encouraged to attend. A tentative agenda for the field tour is included below. If you have any questions please contact us. Information can also be found online: www.lsuagcenter.com on the Sweet Potato Research Station website.

Field Day Agenda

Dr. Arthur Villordon (Horticultural Research)

“Optimization of in-season tissue sampling and supplemental fertilization using growing degree days.”

“Some early-season management variables that determine US#1 storage root count at harvest

Dr. Don Labonte (Sweet Potato Breeding Program)

“Update of advanced selections in the sweet potato breeding program.”

Dr. Tara Smith

“Insect Pest Management and Research Verification.”

Dr. Chris Clark (Disease and Virus Research)

“LSU AgCenter Foundation Seed Program: Sweet potato seed survey results.”

Dr. Donnie Miller (Sweet Potato Weed Research)

“Weed management research in sweet potato.”

Gene Burris (Insect and Nematode Management)

“Nematode management options, sampling procedures and application techniques.”

Dr. Abner Hammond/Dr. Rick Story (Insect Pest Management)

“Evaluation of selected insecticides for control of sweet potato insects.”

Market Outlook

Tara Smith

As of June 1, 2008, several Louisiana producers had a significant supply of sweet potatoes remaining in storage. Projections indicate that the 2007 crop will be exhausted by mid-late August. Ryan Quebedeaux with Harold Quebedeaux Produce in Mansura, La. indicated that “recent movement has been steady for this time of year, and that it was a good sign.” There will most likely be a lag in supply between the 2007 crop and heat cured 2008 potatoes which should be available in mid-September.

The most important factor currently affecting the sweet potato market is the cost of fuel. The increased costs associated with shipping sweet potatoes to various markets are being felt by producers and brokers alike. Wayne Garber, a producer/shipper/broker with Garber Farms in Iota, La., stated that “freight costs have significantly increased over the past 3 months. It is costing about \$1 more per box to ship potatoes now compared to earlier in the year.” That \$1 per box corresponds to approximately \$1,000 more per load. Diesel costs have increased from \$3 to almost \$5 per gallon in the last 3 months. Mr. Garber added that “the value of the product to the grower has decreased due to the higher

freight costs.” The increased freight costs place a downward pressure on the price and brokers and shippers are restricted in their options to offset the higher costs if they expect to remain competitive in the market. In addition, the supply and price received for the crop in other states has a significant effect on Louisiana’s movement and price.

Climate controlled storage or a lack thereof, as we have witnessed this year can also affect the price received for the crop during the spring and summer months. The ability to store potatoes during the warm spring and summer months is something shippers should strive for. The market demands a year long product but not all producers have long-term storage capabilities. The reduction in price that is often realized in the late spring and summer months is in part due to producers or shippers that do not have climate controlled facilities and are forced in some instances to drop the price to move the remainder of their crop. Often times, the effects of this are widespread. The drop in price this year was coupled with increased fuel costs and as a result the current price received for the crop is less than what producers and shippers had hoped for.

Variety Update

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

Evangeline: Evangeline is meeting expectations. Observations in plant beds this year, suggest that this variety may be more sensitive than Beauregard and require more careful handling. Evangeline has been a little behind Beauregard in plant beds this year, but appears to be catching up with increased temperatures. Seed that was pre-sprouted has performed on average better than seed that was not pre-sprouted. We will continue to monitor and follow development of this variety this year and will keep you informed. It is projected that Louisiana will have as much as 2,000 acres planted in this variety in 2008.

LA 05-11: 05-11 is a 2005 selection that has shown real promise in research and demonstration plots to date. This line has yielded as well or better than Beauregard (approximately a 10% yield bump in some locales). This is a nice looking sweet potato. It seems to be a good sprouter, and has done well in our baking and canning trials. We will continue to evaluate this line in our on-farm demonstrations and will update you as

information becomes available.

Industry News

June Meeting of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission

The June meeting of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission will take place Tuesday, June 19, 2008, at the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Conference Room, in Baton Rouge, La. The meeting will begin at 10:00 a.m.

Crop Insurance Committee Meeting: June 12, 2008

A meeting will be held on Thursday, June 12, 2008 at 2 p.m. at the Sweet Potato Research Station, to discuss issues relative to the new crop insurance policy that (Crop Insurance Systems) is preparing to submit to RMA in the near future. Several provisions to the policy need to be discussed prior to submittal. Letters were mailed out to the committee in early June. Please make plans to attend as your schedules permit and contact me prior to the meeting if you have any questions or concerns.

Mid-Year Board Meeting National Sweet Potato Council

The mid-year board meeting of the National Sweet

Potato Council will be held in Washington, D.C., June 22-24, 2008. Items on the agenda include: immigration and farm labor, USDA purchases, and various research topics. Mr. Mark Fields, Mr. Brian Breaux and Mr. Rene Simon will be attending the meeting, representing the Louisiana Sweet Potato Industry. If you have questions or concerns prior to the meeting that require attention, please contact these gentlemen.

LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station Field Day: August 14

The LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station will host a field day on August 14th to highlight the foundation seed and various research programs at the station. A tentative program can be accessed at: www.lsuagcenter.com on the Sweet Potato Research Station webpage. All those with an interest in the sweet potato industry are invited and encouraged to attend. Please contact the station if you have any questions concerning this event **(318-435-2155)**.

Chemical Update

Scholar® (fludioxonil) Syngenta Corporation, fungicide is expected to receive a full federal label for use on sweet potatoes

this fall. Scholar is considered a reduced risk chemical by the EPA. Research has shown that the efficacy of this product against *Rhizopus soft rot* is similar to that of Botran. Scholar is currently accepted in some European markets and should become a viable post harvest aid in the future, for use in European and other markets that restrict the use of other currently labeled fungicides.

Annual Louisiana Farm Bureau Commodity Conferences

The annual Louisiana Farm Bureau commodity conferences will be held Thursday June 26 – Sunday June 29th, 2008. ***The sweet potato commodity division conference will begin at 1 p.m. on Saturday the 28th.*** The labor and environmental conference will be held Friday morning, June 27th, at 10 a.m. The meeting is being held at the New Orleans Marriott Hotel. **(504-581-1000).**

National Sweet Potato Convention: Baton Rouge, La. January 25-27, 2009

The National Sweet Potato Council will hold its annual convention in Baton Rouge, La. 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.'*

Sweet Potato Fun Facts

Approximately 97,500 acres of sweet potatoes were harvested in the United States in 2007.

Louisiana produced 2,925,000 lbs of sweet potatoes in 2007... "Have you eaten your sweet potato today?"

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.

Sweet Potato Specialist

Tara Smith
318-435-2155
tsmith@agctr.lsu.edu
318-557-9501 (cell)

Sweet Potato County Agents

Morehouse Parish &
West Carroll Parish
Myrl Sistrunk
318-428-3571
msistrunk@agctr.lsu.edu

St. Landry Parish &
Evangeline Parish
Gerald Roberts
337-948-0561
groberts@agctr.lsu.edu

Avoyelles Parish
Ernest Freeman
318-253-7526
efreeman@agctr.lsu.edu

Franklin Parish
Carol Pinnell-Alison
318-435-7551
CPinnell-alison@agctr.lsu.edu