

Louisiana Sweet Potato News



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Sweet Potato Crop Update *Dr. Tara Smith, Assistant Professor and Sweet Potato Specialist, LSU AgCenter*

Producers in Louisiana are gearing up for a busy and hopefully bountiful harvest season. As of September 1, 2007, only a few producers had initiated their harvest operations and initial reports indicate average yields. The potatoes have been slow to size up in some areas and there are reports of white grub damage in a few south Louisiana locations. The 2007 harvest will be well under way in the next few weeks. We experienced an unusually wet July across the state. Over 8 inches of rain were recorded at the LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station in July and most production areas in the state received anywhere from 10-12 inches of rainfall during July. The excess moisture delayed crop maturation about 2 weeks, and producers may also see some souring or break down in some areas, particularly in those fields that did not have adequate drainage. The rainfall also delayed planting schedules

on a few acres of the south Louisiana crop. Most of Louisiana's crop was planted from early May through mid June but approximately 15% was planted in late June and July. Despite all of the mid-season rain, producers across the state could benefit from some additional rainfall at this time to size the crop and facilitate harvest.

Louisiana's final sweet potato acreage for 2007, which is based on the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry's GPS mapped acreage, is not complete at this time, but the crop is expected to be between 14,000 and 15,000 acres this year. Despite the decrease in acreage, producers are optimistic about this year's crop, most stating that they expect it to be a good, average crop.

Insect pressure has been heavy across the state this year. Cucumber beetles were the most prevalent insect that was targeted in scouting and management programs. Producers in North Louisiana experienced heavier

populations of this insect than they have in recent years, and most were scouting and spraying on a weekly schedule during June, July and August.

In the October/November issue of the newsletter we will have harvest updates from producers and a synopsis of how the 2007 crop is shaping up. I wish all of you a fruitful and successful harvest and look forward to visiting with you in the coming weeks.

Late-season Insect Concerns

Tara Smith

As the harvest season begins it is important not to neglect or abandon insect pest management programs. Late-planted sweet potatoes should still be scouted on a weekly basis and treatments should be initiated if threshold levels are reached.

Growers should pay close attention to late season cucumber beetle populations and lepidopteran insect pests. Beet armyworms, fall armyworms, corn earworms, and cabbage and soybean loopers numbers may start to build in the coming weeks. Several products are labeled to control these insect pests including Intrepid®, Avaunt® and Spin Tor® insecticides. Treatments should be applied if defoliation

reaches 35% or higher. Sugarcane beetles are also active this time of year and can potentially damage the crop prior to harvest.

Cultural Practice Research Update

*Dr. Arthur Villordon,
Associate Professor, LSU
AgCenter Sweet Potato
Research Station*

We are continuing to investigate variables that contribute to consistent and uniform storage root initiation ("root set"). Specifically, we are focusing on plant bed factors and how these interact with field factors immediately after transplanting -- like temperature, moisture and spacing. Earlier, we have documented that adventitious roots observed five to ten days after transplanting possessed anatomical characteristics that are prerequisite for storage root initiation.

Follow-up studies showed that up to 80% of 5-day-old adventitious roots developed into storage roots. More importantly, preliminary data show that labeled fertilizer nitrogen (15N) applied in field beds are detectable in leaves, stems and storage roots of plants sampled at 35 days after transplanting. This suggests that field bed-applied fertilizer nitrogen might be a contributing factor to consistent root set.

Ongoing studies are focusing on pre-plant nitrogen application rates, spacing and fertilizer application timing effects on storage root number. Current season's tests will be able to provide preliminary data on the presence or absence of interaction between beds and post transplant fertilizer nitrogen levels. Follow-up studies will investigate the role of other nutrients like phosphorus, potassium and micronutrients. We are also evaluating a growing degree day-based model as a tool for predicting an optimum harvest date. This tool can potentially be used with existing methods of scheduling harvest dates to maximize the yield of the economically important US#1 grade.

Weed Research Update:

*Dr. Donnie Miller, Associate
Professor, LSU AgCenter,
St. Joseph Research
Station*

As a result of promising research findings in 2006, the potential use of herbicides not currently available for use in sweet potato applied in a post-emergence directed manner to limit product to plant contact was continued in 2007. Both weed control efficacy and crop tolerance data are being generated in this research.

Research was also initiated in 2007 that will allow direct comparison of Beauregard

and Evangeline sweet potato cultivar tolerance to currently available herbicides. In addition, comparisons of the competitive potential of these cultivars at various weed populations as provided by the various herbicide programs will be evaluated.

We are excited about our current research focus and look forward to sharing results and discussing these projects with producers at the 2008 state meeting.

Market Outlook

Tara Smith

The 2006 Louisiana sweet potato crop is exhausted for the most part. Reports from other sweet potato-producing states indicate that the remainder of the 2006 crop in those areas is dwindling as well.

The current FOB price of \$18-\$19 is expected to hold through September for the initial movement of the 2007 crop. The green market should be stronger this year than it has been the past few years, but it is partially dependent on the supply of cured potatoes in other states. Most markets and buyers do prefer a cured product, which is expected to be available in Louisiana in mid- September.

Industry News

Amendment to Farm Bill

As all of you know, the 2006 harvest season was met with disastrous conditions in several areas across the state. The 2006 crop insurance policy had several shortcomings; one being that crop insurance production totals disqualified most producers from qualifying for 2005-06 FSA Crop Disaster Program.

Mr. Brian Breaux, Louisiana Farm Bureau, aware of the situation, drafted an amendment to pursue a waiver from using crop insurance data when applying for the disaster program. There was definitely merit in doing so, as the Pilot Crop Insurance Program is constantly changing and the production data used are not accurate.

Congressman Boustany offered it as an amendment to the House Farm Bill last month. The "sweet potato" amendment was selected for consideration as Amendment #6. The amendment was presented by congressmen Boustany and Alexander and passed with a voice vote. The House Farm Bill also passed with a vote of 231-191 with the sweet potato amendment attached therein.

If the amendment is pushed through the Senate and signed into law, farmers would be able to apply for the FSA Crop Disaster Program *if they had losses in excess of 35% of their established yield and *if they purchased crop insurance (which is a criterion for all crops to apply for federal crop disaster assistance). Sweet potato producers would be able to qualify for a maximum of \$80,000 in disaster assistance. An opportunity of this magnitude could greatly help to alleviate some of the financial burden associated with the 2006 crop losses.

Avaunt Insecticide labeled

Avaunt® Insecticide (DuPont) was recently labeled for use on sweet potato. This product is labeled for defoliating insect pests such as loopers and armyworms. The rate is 2.5-6.0 ounces of formulated material per acre.

2008 National Convention

The 2008 meeting of the National Sweet Potato Council will be held in Asheville, N.C. at the Grove Park Inn. Dates for the meeting are January 20-22.

Louisiana Sweet Potato Association/Commission Meeting: January 11-12, 2008, Avoyelles Parish

The Louisiana Sweet Potato Association will hold its annual meeting January 11 and 12, 2008. The meeting is being hosted by Avoyelles Parish this year and plans are under way for an informative and exciting meeting. We are changing things up a bit this year with a goal of boosting grower attendance. The meeting will take place on a Friday and Saturday. The association and commission board meetings will be held on Friday, and the state meeting and educational program will take place on Saturday.

A block of rooms is being reserved at the Paragon Casino and Resort in Marksville, La. We hope all growers and others associated with the industry will bring their spouses and make plans to attend for the entire weekend. Specific details on a meeting location and time will follow in the October newsletter.

Statewide Sweet Potato Advisory Meeting: December 4, 2007

A statewide sweet potato advisory meeting will be held December 4, 2007. Last year's meeting was well attended by producers, LSU AgCenter extension and research personnel and industry representatives.

This is an excellent opportunity to network with others in the industry about key issues.

One section of the program will include a discussion on nematodes and nematicides. A Dow AgroSciences representative will be present and will demonstrate fumigation equipment. Please make plans to attend. Updates on a meeting location and time will follow in the next issue of this newsletter.

Recipe of the Day

Lemon Sweet Potato Casserole

A quick method to shred sweet potatoes is in the food processor. All the ingredients are combined together, to make this lemon lover's outstanding dish-it's almost like a pudding.

6 cups shredded peeled sweet potatoes (yams), about 3 medium
2 tbs. margarine or butter, melted
2/3 cup sugar
1 cup skim milk
2 large eggs
1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
4 (serving) box instant lemon pudding and pie filling

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Combine shredded sweet potatoes, margarine, sugar, milk, eggs, cinnamon and pudding mix in a 2-quart oblong casserole dish. Cover tightly with foil and bake for one hour. Remove foil and continue cooking 20 to 30 minutes or until top is golden brown. Makes 10-12 servings.

Per serving: CAL 288 (10% from fat); FAT 3g; PROTEIN 4g; CARB 61g; CHOL 36mg; SODIUM 194mg; SATURATED FAT 1g

* Created by Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission spokesperson, Holly Clegg.

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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