

Louisiana Sweet Potato News



September - October
2008

Vol. 3, No. 3

In This Issue:

- Sweet Potato Crop Update
- Market Outlook
- Variety Update: Evangeline
- Foundation Seed Update
- National Sweet Potato Council Meeting
- Industry News
- Sweet Potato Facts

Sweet Potato Crop Update

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

Too much rain... The majority of Louisiana's sweet potato acreage received torrential rains and was subjected to prolonged saturated conditions during August and September. As of Sept. 25, 2008, producers across the state had resumed harvesting and were assessing their current crop situations. Initial harvest reports across the state, prior to the rain events, indicated an above-average, high-quality 2008 Louisiana sweet potato crop.

Rainfall received in conjunction with hurricanes Gustav and Ike resulted in saturated field conditions and the subsequent souring and breakdown of sweet potato roots that producers are currently experiencing. More than 90 percent of Louisiana producers received 12 inches to 20-plus inches of rainfall with Gustav. Many areas were already wet prior to this rain event, as most sweet potato production areas received 10 or more inches of rain in

August prior to the hurricanes. The two weeks following Hurricane Gustav brought sporadic rainfall to many production areas, which only extended the drying time needed to initiate harvest operations.

The light at the end of the tunnel was barely visible when hurricane Ike reared its ugly head, dropping 4-10 inches of rainfall in some production areas. Avoyelles, Rapides, West Carroll and Morehouse parishes received the brunt of rainfall from this storm, but all areas were somewhat affected, and the harvest season was delayed yet again. Since Aug. 1, producers in several locations reported receiving in excess of 40 inches of rainfall.

Crop loss across the state is currently estimated at just over 50 percent. This is a preliminary estimate, and harvest operations during the next month should paint a clearer picture of what the industry can expect to glean from the 2008 crop. The effects of this year's crop loss will be far-reaching. The farm-gate value of the Louisiana's sweet potato

crop exceeded \$65 million in 2007. Our current situation places that value closer to \$30 million for 2008. The loss of revenue from sweet potatoes that will go unharvested or that are otherwise compromised is an immediate impact, but the effects of this year's crop losses also will have a profound impact on allied industries, availability and value-added worth of the sweet potato crop and next year's seed supply, as well.

Several situations are contributing to crop losses across the state. The majority of producers are experiencing some obvious rot and breakdown of roots in production fields. In addition, producers are aware that roots harvested from adverse soil conditions have the potential to break down in storage. The fresh market pack-out percentage of the harvested crop will also be decreased this year due to a higher number of cull potatoes generated during the packing process. Other than obvious rot, producers are dealing with green ends (soil washed away and root tops subsequently sunburned), typical insect damage and some loss attributed to post-harvest disease.

Less than ideal field conditions at harvest will also result in increased production costs. More time and equipment are required to harvest potatoes from

muddy or adverse field conditions.

On a positive note...

Several thousand acres across the state appear to be minimally impacted by the events discussed above. Several producers are reporting above-average yields and expect to be "OK" despite reporting a 20 percent or higher crop loss.



Blaine Joubert, a producer in St. Landry and Acadia parishes reports an above-average and high-quality crop in 2008.

Field conditions have improved across all production areas during late September, and the majority of producers are harvesting their crops. Harvesting under ideal field conditions allows for easier inspection and culling of rotten and water-damaged potatoes and should minimize the number of damaged potatoes entering storage facilities.

Harvest will be "late" or delayed in some areas. In addition to creating an environment that favors breakdown of roots, saturated soil conditions are a less-than-ideal growing environment for the crop. As a result, potatoes planted in late June and July are 2-4

weeks behind their normal harvest schedule. At our current pace, the 2008 harvest is expected to reach into the Thanksgiving packing season.

USDA reports 16,000 planted acres for Louisiana. Our exact sweet potato acreage for 2008, which is based on the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry's GPS mapped acreage, is not complete at this time, but the crop, similar to 2007, is expected to be between 14,000 and 15,000 acres this year.

A letter was mailed out in early September detailing proper handling procedures for potatoes harvested from wet soils. The most important thing to remember is adequate ventilation. If you have any question or concerns about curing and storing your crop or issues that you have encountered during the harvest season, please call Tara Smith and/or your local extension agent for assistance.

In the December issue of *Louisiana Sweet Potato News* we will have harvest updates from producers and a synopsis of how the 2008 crop fared across the state.

Market Outlook

Tara Smith

The current FOB price for Louisiana sweet potatoes is \$16.50-17.00. The current price received by growers is

\$13.75-14.00. Given the current crop situation, there is uncertainty surrounding Louisiana's long term supply. The market may not respond immediately to an expected shortage in the 2008 Louisiana crop, but the current situation should place an upward pressure on price that may be realized later in the season or early next year.

Wayne Garber, a producer and broker with Garber Farms in Iota, La., indicated that demand was pretty steady. Garber added that, "The price is firm, and there is underlying strength in the market. The price received may not reflect the Louisiana crop losses immediately, but hopefully will at least stabilize and not go any lower." Garber also indicated suppliers were uneasy about Louisiana's supply of kiln-dried potatoes that will be available for the Thanksgiving shipping season. As is normally the case, the remaining supply of the cured 2007 crop in other sweet potato-producing states and the current crop situation in those areas will influence movement and price received for the crop in the coming months.

Variety Update:

Evangeline

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

There are approximately 1,000 acres of Evangeline planted in Louisiana this year. We had hoped to get a "good look" at this variety this year, devoid of any weather disasters or insect outbreaks. Unfortunately, we are experiencing weather-related crop losses. We are, however, learning some useful information about Evangeline this year, despite the stressed conditions.

One point of interest we have noticed is that Evangeline seems to be holding up well under saturated soil conditions. In several locations where Evangeline is planted row to row with Beauregard, there is less breakdown in the Evangeline potatoes. We hope these observations will hold true during storage, since that would prove to be a positive asset for this variety.

Thus far in 2008, Evangeline has yielded on par with Beauregard. Most producers are reporting good size and consistent shape with the variety, although initial reports from Avoyelles Parish indicate poor shape "round" and decreased yield compared

to Beauregard in that area. 2008 was our first look at this variety on a large scale across the state. We will continue to make observations and evaluate this variety throughout the harvest season.

As we learned this spring, the weak spot for this variety is in the seed or plant beds. In light of some of the issues experienced in plant beds in 2008 (sclerotial blight, slow to sprout) we intend to collect and evaluate several samples of Evangeline prior to the 2009 bedding season. In addition, Drs. Chris Clark, Don Ferrin and Tara Smith intend to evaluate several labeled fungicides in plant beds with this variety in on-farm and research station trials in 2009.

Foundation Seed Update

Tara Smith

While I've been traveling across the state in recent weeks the most common question or concern of producers is "What about seed for next year?"

Unfortunately, the LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station was not immune to the weather events discussed above. With Gustav alone, we received 18 inches of rain over a two-day time period. With that said, it appears that our 2008 seed crop

appears to minimally affected. At this time about 30 percent of our acreage has been compromised and will likely not be harvested in its entirety due to breakdown of seed roots in the field.

All seed harvested to date at the station appears sound and is holding up well in storage. Barring any additional weather delays, we should complete our seed harvest by the end of October.

Seed allocation will proceed similar to last year. Letters will be mailed out to parish agents and all producers in November. Once all of the orders have been received (Deadline: Jan. 15, 2009), available seed will be allocated, and producers will be notified about their orders. Orders received after Jan. 15, 2009, will be handled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Given Louisiana's current crop situation and the expected shortage of seed on-farm next year, we intend and are expecting to allocate all seed to in-state producers this year. Out-of-state orders will be taken and will be filled only after all Louisiana orders have been satisfied.

If you have any questions concerning the foundation seed program, please call Tara Smith at the Sweet Potato Research Station (318-435-2155).

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. 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.

Information on registration, sponsorship, program and agenda updates and exhibitor opportunities can be found on the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission Web site (www.sweetpotato.org), the National Council Web site (www.sweetpotatousa.org), or is available by contacting Tara Smith at the LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station. If you have any questions concerning the 2009 convention, please contact Mark Fields, president of the 2009 convention at mfields@allencanning.com, or Tara Smith with the LSU AgCenter at tsmith@agcenter.lsu.edu.

Industry News:

Chemical Update

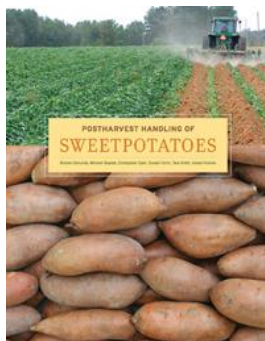
Several "new" insecticides were labeled this year for use on sweet potatoes in Louisiana and are currently being evaluated by LSU AgCenter researchers. Newly available insecticides include: Leverage®, Hero®

and Endigo®. Two of the products, Leverage and Endigo, offer a dual mode of action, with a pyrethroid and a systemic neonicotinoid insecticide combination. Efficacy information, insect pest spectrum and application rates for these products will be discussed at the state advisory meeting in December and the LSPA state meeting in January. A chemical update with this information and any additional information or changes will be mailed to producers in spring 2009.

Post-harvest Handling of Sweet Potatoes

A revised and updated post-harvest handling bulletin is now available. This publication was a joint effort of LSU AgCenter and North Carolina State research and extension personnel. This publication covers the importance of proper harvesting techniques, as well as curing and storage conditions, that will promote quality and extend the storage life of sweet potatoes. It also includes information on packing line sanitation, product safety, certification standards, USDA grade standards for sweet potatoes and construction guidelines for storage facilities. The publication is available online at: www.lsuagcenter.com, by accessing the Sweet Potato Research Station Web

page. In addition, the bulletin will be disseminated by mail and at meetings this winter.



Statewide Sweet Potato Advisory Meeting Set for Dec. 3, 2008

A statewide sweet potato advisory meeting will be held Dec. 3, 2008, at the LSU AgCenter Scott Center in Winnsboro, La. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. and will conclude with lunch. 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. The meeting this year will highlight economic and management information, as well as updates from several research programs.

La. Sweet Potato Association State Meeting Scheduled Jan. 6-7, 2009

The Louisiana Sweet Potato Association will hold its annual meeting Jan. 6-7,

2009. The meeting will be held at the LSU AgCenter extension office in Oak Grove, La. The meeting is being hosted by Northeast Louisiana Sweet Potato Growers' Association this year, and plans are under way for an informative meeting. The association and commission board meetings will be held on Tuesday afternoon (Jan. 6) and will be followed with a meal that evening. The state meeting and educational program will take place on Wednesday morning (Jan. 7) and will conclude with lunch. Additional details and information regarding this meeting will be provided soon.

2009 National Convention

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."*

Mark Fields Named 2008 Mr. Yam

Mark Fields has been selected as the 2008 Yambilee Festival's *Mr. Yam*. Fields has a long and

devoted history with the Louisiana sweet potato industry and is well deserving of this honor. Fields currently serves as plant manager of Allen Canning Co. in Hessmer, La. In addition, he is extremely active in all industry organizations and currently serves as president of the National Sweet Potato Council, Louisiana Sweet Potato Association and Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission. Please extend your appreciation and congratulations to him. His efforts and dedication to our industry are to be commended and are extremely appreciated.

Gerald Roberts, County Agent, St. Landry Parish, Retires

Gerald Roberts, county agent in St. Landry and Evangeline parishes, retired from the LSU AgCenter (and Southern University) after more than 32 years of service. Roberts has worked with the sweet potato industry in Louisiana throughout most of his career. The industry would like to thank Roberts for his many years of service and dedication to the industry and wish him well in his retirement.

Vincent Deshotel Given Sweet Potato Duties for St. Landry and Evangeline

Vince Deshotel, LSU AgCenter county agent in St. Landry Parish has assumed sweet potato responsibilities in St. Landry and Evangeline parishes. Deshotel says he is excited and eager to work with Louisiana sweet potato producers. Please welcome him and feel free to contact him if you have any questions or concerns about your crop. Deshotel's contact information can be found in the information box on this page.

Sweet Potato Facts

- United States planted Sweet Potato Acreage 2008: 104,000
- One cup of canned sweet potatoes equals one medium-sized, cooked fresh sweet potato

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@agcenter.lsu.edu
(318) 557-9501 (cell)

Sweet Potato County Agents

Morehouse Parish
And West Carroll Parish
Myrl Sistrunk
(318) 428-3571
msistrunk@agcenter.lsu.edu

St. Landry Parish
And Evangeline Parish
Vince Deshotel
(337) 948-0561
vdeshotel@agcenter.lsu.edu

Avoyelles Parish
Ernest Freeman
(318) 253-7526
efreeman@agcenter.lsu.edu

Franklin Parish
Carol Pinnell-Alison
(318) 435-7551
CPinnell-Alison@agcenter.lsu.edu