UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION

UGA Cotton Team Newsletter
April 2026

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Irrigation System Prep and Early Season Water Requirements for Cotton Production (*Wes Porter, David Hall, Jason Mallard, Phillip Edwards, and Savannah Beasley*): Corn planting has pretty much wrapped up and it's time to move into cotton and peanut. Unless we have a drastic change we are and have been extremely dry since fall 2025. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, we are in an Extreme to Exceptional Drought throughout a majority of the southern region of Georgia. I also placed these two figures here to show how unfortunately from week to week the drought is continually getting worse. Yes, we did catch some rain across the state on Friday and maybe some on Sunday, but overall, it was not enough to knock a dent into our drought situation. We are significantly behind on rainfall, which started at the end of last summer and has continued until now. We are below normal on our depth to water table levels across most of the state and especially in the southern region. We are not in the same situation that we were in during 2012, but if we do not start getting significant rainfall, we may get there rapidly. At this point, we are not predicted to move into a wet season either unfortunately.

This season will be difficult with lower cotton prices and ever increasing input costs, so we need to focus on areas where we can maximize our efforts. Producers must not forget the fundamentals and basics of irrigation efficiency. Make sure that you do not overlook one of your largest investments and one that is just as important as any other, your irrigation systems. Now is an optimal time, if you have not already done so, to do routine and preventative maintenance on your irrigation systems to ensure they are in top shape and prepared for the season. There are two important actions that need to be performed before you begin planting your cotton. The first one is an overall irrigation system check and the second is specifically focusing on water application uniformity of your system. First look up the Spring Center Pivot and Lateral Irrigation System Preparation | UGA Cooperative Extension (B1452) and go through

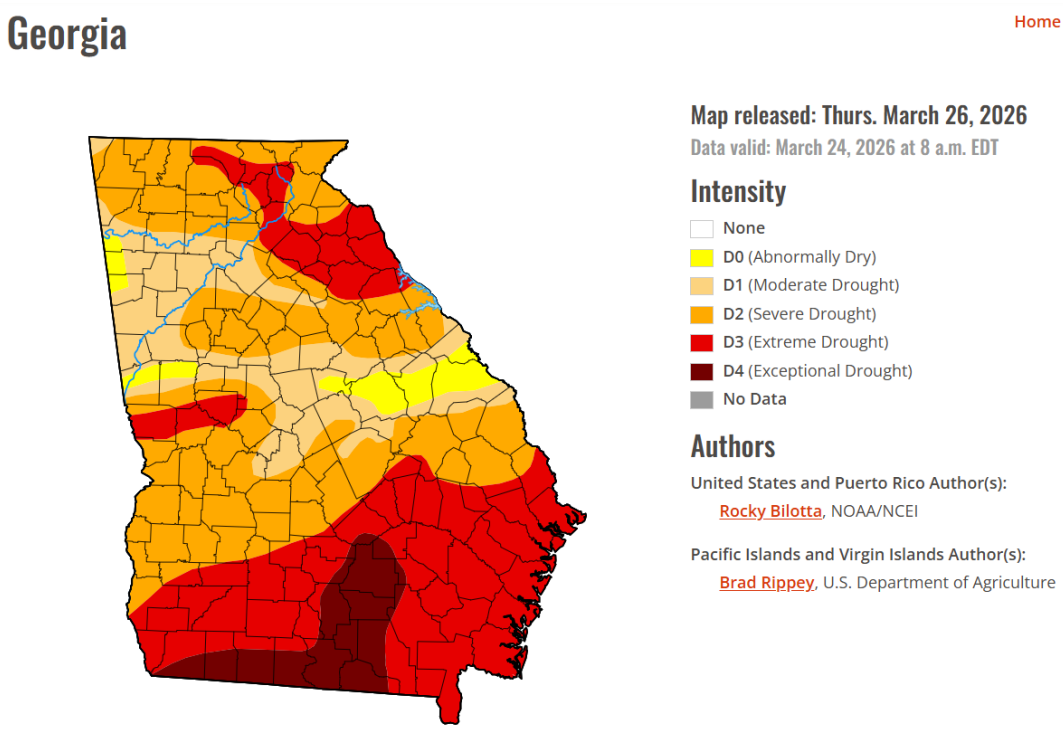


Figure 1. US Drought Monitor Map for Georgia released March 26, 2026.

the checklist that includes all main components on your irrigation system to ensure that they are working properly. Some of these components can include but are not limited to the power unit, pumping system, pipes and drains, electrical systems (which includes cellular connections for remote monitoring and GPS), safeties, tires, gear box oil level and leaks, and the switches on the auto stop feature. Once you have checked all of these components, start the irrigation system and finish checking components by documenting any clogged or partially clogged nozzles along with any visible leaks. Center pivot irrigation systems are built for precision application of water to the crops. Check the system pressure, flow, sprinkler performance, end gun arc/travel and booster pump operation. A reduction in pressure and GPM from last year or brass and excessive sand in the trap may be a good indication of potential well issues. An example of the system flowrate and application rate for a center-pivot irrigation system is represented in Figure 3. It is important to remember that due to increasing travel speed as we move towards the end of the pivot, the system flow rate (represented as dashed black line) will go up, but the application depth (represented as solid blue line) should remain consistent. This is achieved with properly sized sprinkler packages. It is important to be sure if nozzles are replaced we use the same exact design as the original. Close is not good enough when replacing nozzles, as small adjustments can have significant impact on water application. Multiple issues on a center pivot can have an impact on several acres of the irrigated cropland, especially towards the end of a system. A center pivot is designed at a specific flow with each nozzle playing a role in the distribution of precision water application across the field.

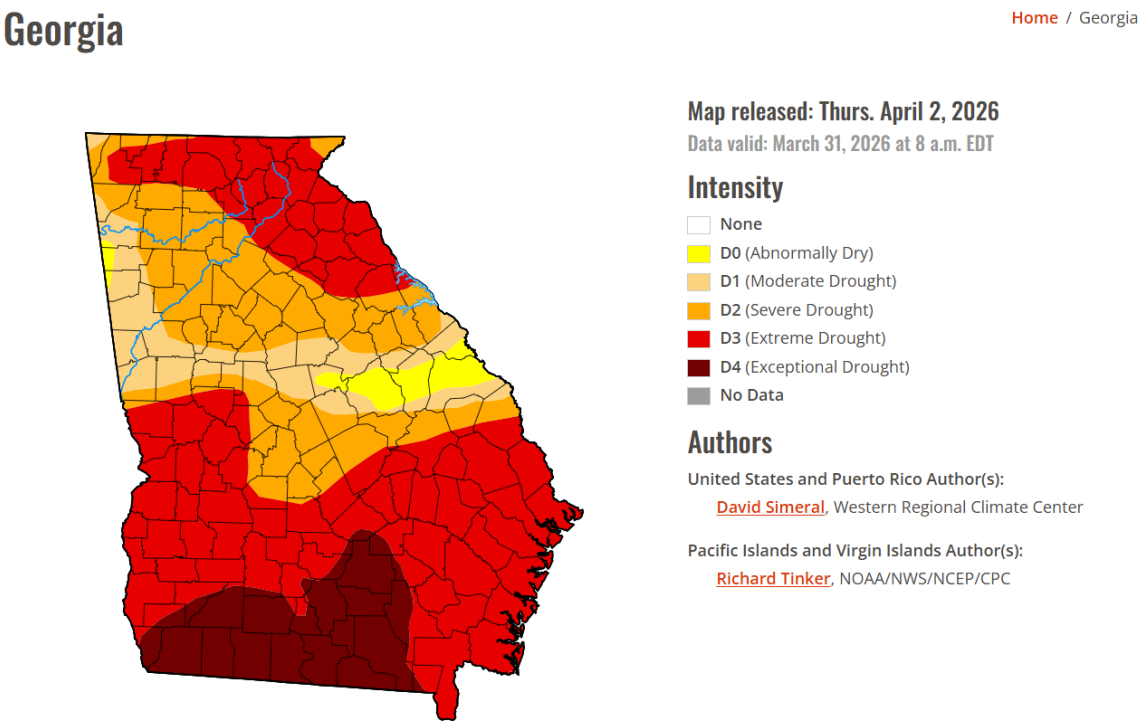
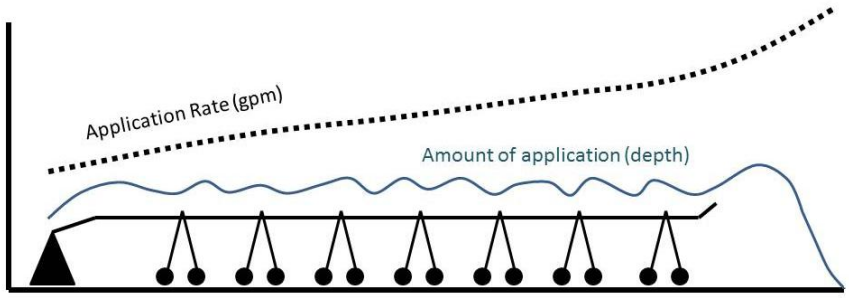


Figure 2. US Drought Monitor Map for Georgia released April 1, 2026.



Application Rate and Depth

Figure 3. Application rate and depth across a pivot tower.

It can be very difficult to detect differences between individual sprinklers and banks of sprinklers on a pivot visually, so it is strongly recommended that an application uniformity test be performed on the center pivot to detect any discrepancies along the tower length. A UGA Factsheet titled Evaluating and Interpreting Application Uniformity of Center Pivot Irrigation Systems | UGA Cooperative Extension (C911) is a very good step by step guide to accomplish this process. If you need any further guidance on either of these or have interest in having an on-farm uniformity test performed, contact your UGA County

Extension Agent and they can help get the process started. By following these suggestions, you should have a properly operating pivot ready to go for the upcoming production season. Depending on your water source and quality, it may be necessary to replace nozzle packages every 5 to 10 years.
To illustrate the importance of pivots applying water uniformly, Figure 4 has an example of possible dollars that can be left on the table from a 235-acre pivot.

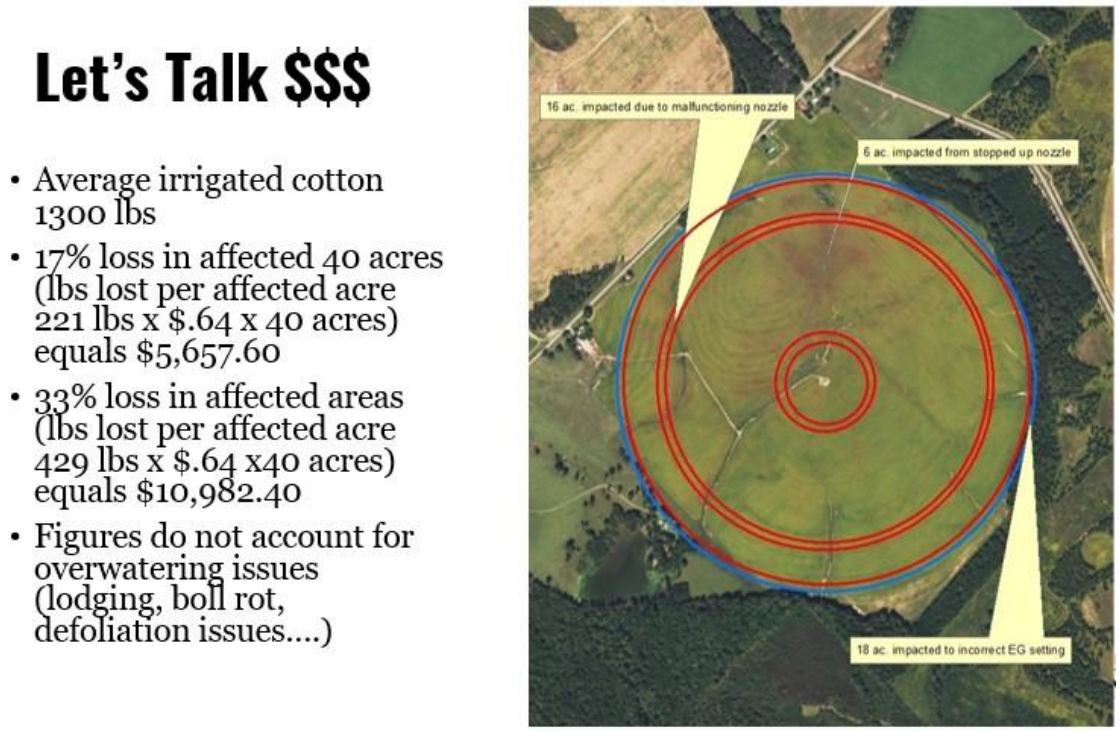


Figure 4. Example calculations of yield loss from a Pivot with uniformity issues.

The 40 acres highlighted are areas where a nozzle, or nozzles, are partially clogged, malfunctioning, or simply the wrong nozzle size that replaced a missing one. The end gun arc adjustments in this example are incorrect, leading to underwatering the last 90-100 feet and overwatering in the overhang or end of the pivot area. Remember, once water is flowing from the pivot, the cost of pumping the water is the same whether you apply it uniformly or not, but the maximum return of dollars from our crop can be drastically reduced.

Once you have the pivot up and running and are confident that the system is adequately applying water uniformly with no problems, it is time to start thinking about water requirements for your crops. It's important that you keep an eye on the current weather and soil moisture conditions as you begin planting crops. Cotton typically does not require a lot of water (Figure 5) in the first month after planting and in some cases if adequate rainfall is received cotton can go up to squaring and even bloom without additional irrigation applications as exhibited by the red box and water use curve below. However, we have been drier and felt warmer than normal so unless we see a drastic change it is highly likely that you

will need to apply a few irrigation applications early in the season. The red box below represents the first five weeks of cotton water requirements after planting. Knowing your irrigation efficiency (typically around 65-70% for high pressure systems and 80-90% for low pressure systems), keep track of rainfall and temperature, and make irrigation applications accordingly. Keep in mind that the water requirement below is irrigation plus rainfall, and the weekly water requirement recommendation was developed based on a historical average evapotranspiration. So, your actual water/irrigation requirement may vary based on weather conditions and rainfall during the growing season. For a more in-depth irrigation recommendation it is suggested that you investigate implementing either a computer scheduling model either online or via a Smartphone App, or soil moisture sensors. Cotton responds negatively to ill-timed and over-applied irrigation during critical growth periods, usually causing yield reductions. Even if the yield is not reduced methods such as the Checkbook have shown to have much higher irrigation application amounts with lower irrigation water use efficiency (IWUE), meaning profit is lost. Once planters start rolling, time becomes very valuable. If you are considering utilizing advanced technologies for irrigation scheduling, now is the time to download apps and/or make arrangements for purchasing or leasing or obtaining equipment through a dealer or consultant. In years where commodity prices are lower, achieving the best yield possible can help, but finding ways to be more profitable is the important goal. Ideally, the two go hand in hand, but this isn't always the case.

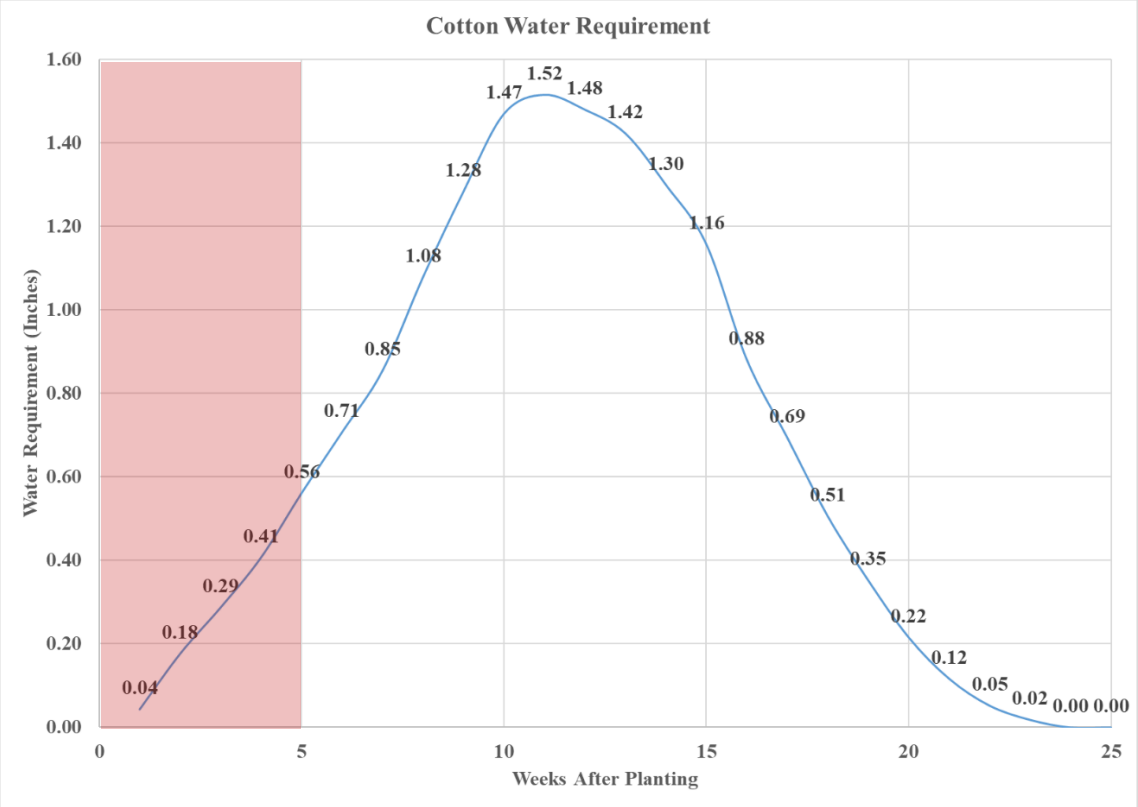


Figure 5. Seasonal Cotton Water Requirement.

As mentioned earlier, UGA Extension's cotton irrigation guide recommends very little water once the stand is established. Once the planters start rolling, farmers will be focused specifically on planting to try to finish while sufficient moisture is present to ensure good germination and stand. Once moisture begins to leave the optimum planting level, plan your planting schedule around an irrigation event the day before planting, if available. If it stays dry, irrigation will be needed soon after planting too. The pre-planting irrigation application is critical in the current conditions. Keep in mind, you will want to be planting the next day to optimize the moisture. In doing this, careful consideration to the amount of water applied must be determined using such factors as available moisture, soil type and projected weather. There is a fine line between not being able to reap the benefits of irrigation by not applying enough water or having to wait an extra day to dry out, costing time and money.

UGA Extension has developed a quick and easy irrigation scheduling guide that is laminated and contains the four major row crops grown in Georgia. The guide can also be downloaded at Irrigation Reference Guide for Corn, Cotton, Peanuts, and Soybeans | UGA Cooperative Extension
Further questions about early season cotton irrigation and specific situations should be directed to your local UGA Extension County Agent.

Early Season Disease and Nematode Issues for Cotton Farmers: You Get One Chance (*Bob Kemerait*): My message to growers early in the season, early in every season, is to consider carefully the opportunities that are available only until the furrow is closed. These include planting date (and the environmental conditions associated with any planting date), the variety that is planted (especially with attention to nematode and disease resistant varieties), seeding rate, and the choice of in-furrow product or seed treatment that is used. As I say, over and over, once the furrow is closed, growers are largely on the sideline watching their cotton play against Team Nematode, Team Seedling Disease, Team Fusarium Wilt, and Team Bacterial Blight. There are few, if any, plays to call once the furrow is closed. Drought early in 2026 could affect performance of granular in-furrow products that require some soil moisture to be activated.

Plant parasitic nematodes, to include the southern root-knot, the reniform, the sting, and the Columbia lance nematodes, are important pests that reduce yields in our cotton fields across Georgia every year. Seedling diseases, especially when caused by *Rhizoctonia solani*, and, to a lesser degree, *Pythium* and other fungal pathogens, are a potential problem in every field every year. To combat nematodes and protect seed and seedlings against disease, essential decisions must be made very early in the season, prior to, or at the time of, planting. Prior to closing the furrow, growers have opportunities to protect their seed and plant-stands in ways that have impact on the yield potential for the remainder of the season. The following is a "laundry list" of actions that a grower MUST consider in order to protect the seeds and cotton seedlings.

1. There are several important fungal pathogens that can cause both pre-emergent and post-emergent stand loss in a cotton field. In Georgia, *Pythium* species are can be commonly associated with "pre-emergent damping-off" where the seedling dies before cracking the soil surface. The most

common seedling disease of cotton in Georgia is "soreshin" caused by Rhizoctonia solani. "Soreshin" is a post-emergent seedling disease and is easily recognized by seedlings that wilt and die within a week or two. Protecting the young plants from seedling diseases is a three-step process. The first step, where possible, is to plant high-quality seed with a strong, documented, germination rate. It is difficult, if not impossible to recover when poor-quality seed is planted. The second step is to plant under conditions that result in rapid, uniform germination and vigorous growth. Cool, and wet soils, or planting just ahead of a cold rain, can slow germination and plant growth. Such gives the fungal pathogens, "the bad guys", the chances to play catch-up with the peanut seeds and seedlings, infect and then damage them. The third step is to ensure that the seeds are well-protected with a fungicide seed treatment. All commercial seed will come pre-treated with a "base" fungicide package. The base package varies among different seed companies, but is always composed of a mix of three-to-four fungicides that have proven efficacy against common pathogens like *Rhizoctonia*, *Pythium*, and *Fusarium*. From my studies in about four-out-of-five years, use of the "base" fungicide treatment alone results in stands and yields similar to where additional fungicide seed-treatments or in-furrow fungicides are applied. However, investment in extra "insurance" with additional seed-treatments or in-furrow fungicides may be beneficial. Growers are most likely to observe a benefit from "extra" treatments where risk to seeding disease is elevated, such as when planting into cool and wet soils or conservation tillage. Additional seed protection may also be beneficial when planting at reduced seeding rates or where seed-quality is thought to be an issue.

2. Protecting seeds and seedlings from death and loss of vigor is an important task for growers. In addition to the steps outlined above, growers can use additional seed-treatments or in-furrow applications to compliment the performance of base seed-treatments and to further protect against seedling diseases. "Extra" fungicide seed-treatments are more convenient to use; in-furrow fungicides may be more effective as they can be used to treat the seed and the soil surrounding the seed as well.
3. Nematodes can be devastating to a cotton crop. Southern root-knot and sting nematodes are especially problematic in sandier areas of a field. Reniform nematodes tend to be more problematic in "heavier" soils which have higher levels of silts and clays. The best way to determine if nematodes are a problem in a field is by taking soil samples at harvest, or, for southern root-knot nematodes, by examining roots of affected plants. Areas in a field, especially sandier areas of a field, where plants remain small and stunted despite adequate moisture and soil fertility, may be affected by nematodes. Growers can minimize damage from southern root-knot and reniform nematodes by a) planting appropriate root-knot and reniform nematode resistant varieties, b) by fumigating with Telone II, c) by using Velum (6.5 fl oz/A), AgLogic 15GG (5-7 lb/A), Outreach (8 fl oz/A), or Averland FC (3.5 fl oz/A) in-furrow at planting, or by using one of several seed-treatment nematicides. Growers can apply Vydate C-LV or Return XL at the 5th-to-7th

true-leaf stage to compliment the earlier nematicide treatments. As there are currently no commercial varieties with resistance to Columbia lance, or sting nematodes, growers must use nematicides to protect their crop.

4. Fusarium wilt, caused by *Fusarium oxysporum* fsp. *vasinfectum*, is a significant problem in some fields in Georgia. Here in the southeastern United States, Fusarium wilt occurs as a complex of the fungus and nematodes, especially the root-knot and sting nematodes. Effective management of Fusarium wilt requires that growers protect their cotton with effective nematicides, such as those noted above.
5. Bacterial blight has not been a significant problem since 2017; however the problem can still occur in some fields under favorable conditions. The only tactic to fight bacterial blight is to plant a bacterial-blight resistant variety.

Growers have the opportunity prior to, and at planting time to manage important problems that include seedling diseases and seed rots, plant-parasitic nematodes, Fusarium wilt, and bacterial blight. Growers are encouraged to carefully consider their options and to make informed decisions to best protect their cotton crop at this critical part of the season.

A Few Preplant and At-planting Thoughts for Weed Control (*Stanley Culpepper and Jenna Vance*):

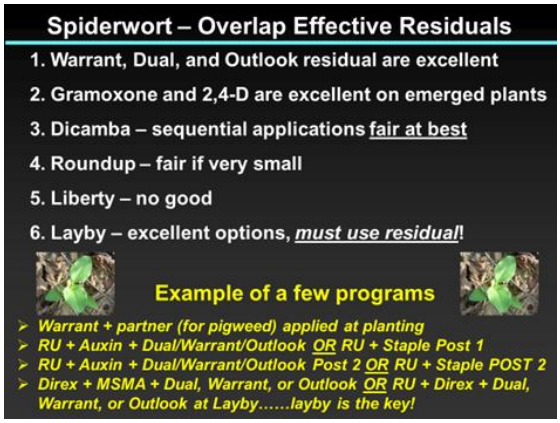
Ryegrass that cannot be controlled with Roundup has been documented in Georgia and complaints of Roundup "missing" ryegrass are rising very quickly. Be certain to document fields where these escapes are occurring so a sustainable program can be implemented beginning this fall for next season. A successful program for next year would utilize effective residual herbicides applied in the fall while hopefully also planting a cover crop. To get by with a band-aid approach for planting this year, Gramoxone or Liberty may get you by if you are fortunate enough to have ideal conditions and mature enough ryegrass; unfortunately, seeds will likely be produced. Keep in mind that just because ryegrass does not die from a Roundup application it does not mean one has resistance. Other factors can often lead to lack of ryegrass control by Roundup, including large plants, cold nighttime temperatures, antagonism from tank mixes, and the rate of Roundup being too low.

Residual herbicides remain the NUMBER ONE method to help achieve a successful weed management program. However, in dry-land production when rainfall is scarce, activating these tools is obviously a challenge. Our research has noted products like Reflex can lay on the soil and wait nearly 3 weeks for rainfall and still be very effective on weeds that have not emerged. Warrant also performs quite well with our data suggesting it can sit on the soil for about 11 days and still be effective; however, many other products like your yellow herbicides lose activity in the matter of a few days.

Avoiding injury from herbicides applied preemergence under drought conditions is a huge concern but so is not applying residual herbicides as the potential lack of weed control can be costly. Regardless, deciding to wait until the cotton emerges before applying herbicides may be the only option for some acres. If one decides to plant cotton into dry soils without residual herbicides, there are several key points to consider regarding weed control.

First, there needs to be no weeds emerged (especially Palmer) when the cotton seed is placed in dry soil. In theory, if the field is weed-free when dusting cotton in the soil then no additional weeds should emerge until it rains. ***Second,*** the first postemergence herbicide application should occur as soon as the cotton is fully emerged; the treatment must kill emerged weeds and must include residual herbicides. The level of selection pressure placed on the postemergence herbicide in this situation is very high and not sustainable in time. ***Third,*** a second postemergence herbicide application should be made 12 to 15 days later and again should include a residual product; this application timing assumes you were timely with the first postemergence application. If you were not timely, the interval needs to be shortened following label recommendations. ***And finally,*** the value of the layby application in fields without a preemergence herbicide increases astronomically.

Benghal dayflower aka tropical spiderwort continues to maintain its status of being a major pest for many Georgia cotton farmers. To successfully manage this pest, one must understand the importance of placing effective residual herbicides strategically throughout the growing season starting at planting. The most effective herbicide option at planting is Warrant! If the weed is up before planting, Gramoxone + diuron or 2,4-D are extremely effective. The slide to the right provides potential season long program approaches.



Dry Weather Persists in East Georgia (*Wade Parker*): It was nice to see a cold front move through the state on Easter Sunday with some much-needed rain. Unfortunately, the front really began to lose steam as it moved East. This loss in energy resulted in many of our counties only receiving .1-.25" of rain. This year is especially more serious as market prices for most of our row crops are below the cost of production. As Dr. Hand said it on more than one occasion during production meetings, "The only way to combat low commodity prices is to produce more." While there is truth to that phrase, we must have good weather to accomplish that.

Most of our corn farmers are wrapping up their 2026 corn planting season. This is the first time in a long time I can remember farmers irrigating in advance to plant corn. This situation is applicable to cotton in the fact that we could pick up more cotton acres as dryland corn acres decreased significantly in the last two weeks. If the ten-day forecast remains negative, here are some preliminary items to remember going forward:

Long Planting Window
Georgia is fortunate to have a long planting window for cotton. As the planting season rapidly approaches, it is easy to succumb to the temptation to plant. I would use caution and wait as long as possible to plant if conditions are non-conducive to getting an acceptable stand. The large planters and other large pieces of equipment do not take long to get an entire crop planted. Again, it is especially important to pay attention to the ten-day forecast, as long range forecasts can often signal relief and pattern break-ups.

Dusting in Cotton
Dusting in cotton or any crop refers to the practice of placing seeds into dry soil, in anticipation of getting suitable rain soon. The big motivating factor behind this concept is fighting against the clock. Many growers feel that to finish planting on time, you must start on time. I have seen the dusting in concept to be extremely successful to being a total failure. The biggest risk is dusting in cotton and receiving a .1-.2" rain. This will cause swelling of the seed and formation of the radicle. The radicle will start emerging, only to hit dry soil and die. On the positive side, if a grower receives a solid rain, then seedlings will emerge normally and production can continue. It is all about risk and luck. Fortunately, as mentioned previously we do have a long planting window – thus dusting in cotton should be a last resort.

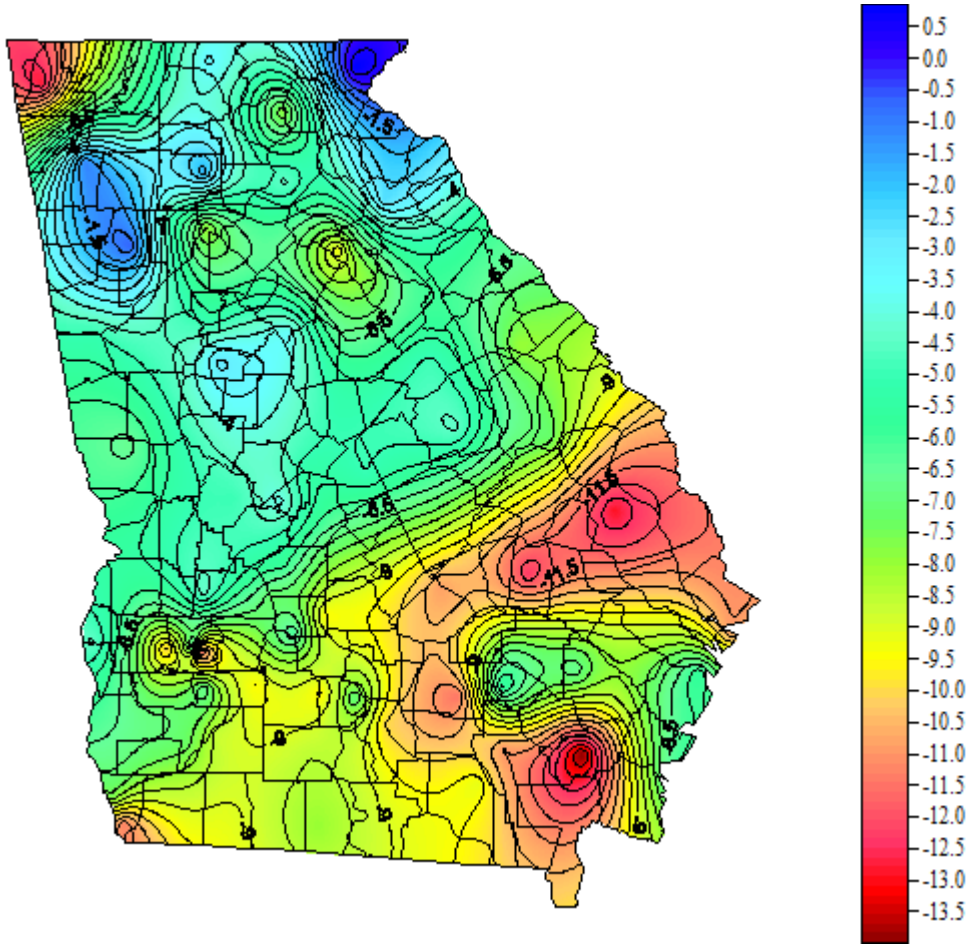
Encapsulated acetochlor herbicides
Tropical Spiderwort (*Commelina benghalensis*) is slowly increasing in many fields in the state. The presence of spiderwort could cause an increase in the use of encapsulated acetochlor herbicides (Warrant or Enversa), as they can be highly effective. These products are unique in the fact that they are encapsulated, which allows us the ability to use them safely PRE in cotton. Ideally around a half an inch of rainfall or irrigation is necessary for activation. Without moisture, it is possible the encapsulation breaks down and releases the active ingredient prior to the cotton plant emerging, which can cause significant injury. If this may be the case, use other herbicide options, just be prepared to fight spiderwort early post with an applicable product.

Crop Insurance Concepts
If dry conditions do persist, crop insurance questions will start popping up. Questions such as preventative planting, what crop(s) am I allowed to plant, planting deadlines, do I have to pay the premium if I do not plant a crop etc. While these questions are the responsibility of crop adjusters and insurance agents, it does not hurt to become familiar with the information. You do not need to be an insurance agent but be aware as your growers will need guidance. Use good judgement!

There are many more issues that arise if dry conditions persist. We can continue this conversation in the May issue, if conditions worsen. Good Luck!

Dry Conditions, Early Decisions: Getting Cotton Off to the Right Start (*Camp Hand*): As we are now firmly in the first full week of April and cold weather seems to be behind us, I have started getting calls about planting cotton and have been notified of some cotton going in the ground. April 7th feels early for us to start in some areas of the state, but many are getting going for a good reason.

If you have read other entries in this newsletter, some have mentioned how dry it is. Below is a map from the Georgia Weather Monitoring Network, displaying the deviation from normal rainfall for the state of Georgia from January 1 to April 6.



This picture indicates that most of Georgia is at least 5 inches behind on rainfall, but in the southern portion of the state, we are 9+ inches behind. This is certainly an alarming way to enter into the 2026 crop season.

Many will mention the drought from the fall of 2011 to 2012 and compare to what we are in now, and it certainly may be justified. However, what some won't mention is that the best yield we have ever made as a state in Georgia was in 2012. Not saying it will happen in 2026 – but it doesn't hurt to be optimistic.

One major thing on the forefront of my mind is being in a good spot when the opportunity to plant presents itself – obviously more of a dryland predicament, but certainly could help with irrigated farms as well. Over the last few years, there has been a lot more cover cropping around, and that is for a good

reason – protecting the soil, providing some weed control, recycling nutrients, etc. However, as we are now in the first week of April and we are so behind on rainfall, I believe it is time to start thinking about burndown applications on cover crops or weedy covers, particularly on dryland fields. If a cover crop or weed is green, that means it is still actively growing, which means it is using water. In the situation we are in right now, with very little widespread rain and none in the long range forecast, that is not a good thing in my mind.

On the station we began killing cover last week, which is later than I wanted to do it. I believe that fields going to cotton in Georgia that have a cover crop or weedy cover on them right now, need to get sprayed ASAP, regardless of when you intend to plant. I know that may seem like overkill (no pun intended), but to preserve what little moisture we have and take advantage of a planting rain when the opportunity presents itself, I think we need to ensure that actively growing cover crops or weeds are not robbing moisture from us. Another thing to keep in mind is that some burndown products require a certain amount of time and/or rainfall prior to planting – be sure to consult labels and/or your county extension agent prior to making that decision.

For those that are curious, our final yield in Georgia in 2025 was 1,047 lbs/acre, which is the second best crop in our state's history. I know that many challenges were faced last year – but we still made an incredible crop and I want everyone to keep that in mind as we enter 2026. USDA anticipates that cotton acres will go up in Georgia in 2026, which I also believe will be the case. Let's start the year off right, control what we can control, and put ourselves in a position to be successful. As always, if you need anything please don't hesitate to reach out to your local UGA County Extension Agent – they and the rest of the UGA Cotton Team are here to help!

Maximize Cotton Emergence by Ensuring Your Planter is Ready (*Wes Porter and Lauren Lazaro*): Corn has been or is being planted currently, and the next step will be transitioning to cotton and peanut planting. Although cotton planting is still a few weeks away across the state, now is an ideal time for growers to begin inspecting planters and completing any necessary maintenance to ensure readiness. This season is going to be tough on cotton, with rising input prices and very low cotton prices. We cannot afford to make mistakes throughout the season, especially not with planting and stand establishment.

In the cases where planters have already been used to plant corn, it's important to note that some **significant changes** in planter settings are required to ensure accurate metering and seed placement for cotton. Planter malfunctions in the field or mistakes at planting are common and can become costly, especially with high seed prices this year. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the planters are dialed in for peak performance in the field. A planter checklist is available here: https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C1231&title=row-crop-planter-checklist-tips-to-achieve-successful-stand-establishment

Extension Agents and growers are encouraged to utilize this checklist and go thoroughly over different planter components to check if any parts need replacement or adjustment to get it field ready. Once out in the field, it is important that the operator gets out of the tractor during the first few passes to carefully check seed depth and spacing **across all rows** behind the planter. This is also the best time to

ensure that the planter is setup and functioning properly for the given field conditions, such as soil moisture, residue, etc.

A few other key points to consider related to planter setup and performing in-field checks when planting cotton are:

1. **Seed depth** – The recommended seed depth for planting cotton is 0.5 to 1.0 inches and if the same planter has been used for planting corn, it is most likely set closer to 1.5 to 2.0 inches deep. Verify seed depth before planting both on a hard surface and in the field. Mechanical seed depth settings (T-bar handle adjustments) can vary among the row-units on the same planter so take the time to check planted seed depth for each row-unit and make necessary adjustments accordingly. This is especially important when planting cotton at shallower depths (≤0.5 inch) as even a small deviation from target depth setting on some row-units can result in seeds being placed on top of the ground instead of in the soil with proper seed-to-soil contact.
2. **Downforce** – Proper planter downforce is important to achieve target seeding depth so make sure the downforce system (whether utilizing mechanical, pneumatic, or an active hydraulic system) is set to apply adequate downforce on each row-unit. For planting cotton, the required downforce could range anywhere from 0 (just the weight of the row-unit itself) up to 200 lbf depending on the soil type, moisture content, and field conditions at planting. Lighter sandy soils and conventional tillage systems will require considerably less downforce than heavy loamy soils and conservation systems (strip-till or no-till). Higher moisture content will require lower downforce to prevent compaction. Remember it is common to have variable conditions within the same field, so make sure to adjust settings accordingly as field conditions change within the same field or when moving from one field to another.
3. **Seeding Rate** – The recommended seeding rate for cotton is at least 2 seeds per row-foot to attain a plant population of 1.5 to 1.75 plants per row-foot (again here the seed plate and plant population for corn are drastically different so adjust the population accordingly for cotton). **Double check the seed plate and ensure you have switched the plate and any other internal components to cotton.** For growers planting less than 2 seeds per row-foot, it is critical to avoid any seed metering and placement issues as it may result in inadequate stand establishment with a potential for yield loss. For growers who are not utilizing a seed monitor during planting, it is highly recommended to check all seed meters on a test stand before planting to verify meter performance, especially singulation. Growers should check the availability of seed meter test stands with their nearest dealership as most equipment dealers have these available today and offer seed meter testing as a service. Seed meter testing is important as any unnecessary skips or multiples during planting will result in poor or uneven stand establishment which can further impact yield if the stand is reduced significantly.
4. **Planter Vacuum Level** – Cotton seed being smaller than corn and peanut seed is also very sensitive to vacuum pressure, so make sure to adjust the vacuum appropriately to avoid skips and multiples. Each manufacturer and individual models of planters have different vacuum setting recommendations,

start by finding the manual to your planter and setting the vacuum at the recommended level. Recent studies have shown that incremental increases in vacuum level can help to alleviate some seeding rate and seed singulation problems, but monitor seed singulation closely as to avoid doubles.

5. **Seed Placement and Seed-to-Soil Contact** – The first step is to check seed tubes to ensure they are free of debris and the seed has a clear path. Proper setup and functioning of row-cleaners (when planting in conservation systems), double-disc openers, gauge-wheels, and closing wheels for prevalent field conditions is critical for attaining adequate seed placement and proper seed-to-soil contact. Make sure that the double-disc openers are creating a true V-shape furrow, gauge-wheels are running tightly (but not rubbing excessively) against the opening-discs, and closing wheels are aligned behind the planter and set to apply adequate pressure to properly close the furrow. Check for any signs of improper furrow formation when doing field checks behind the planter and make necessary adjustments. It is important to have both good seed placement and seed-to-soil contact for timely and uniform emergence.
6. **Planting Technology** – Several planting technologies are available today on modern planters to improve seeding performance. Ensure to perform a thorough and timely inspection (at least a week or more) before planting to check status and functioning of all technology components including GPS, seed monitor, wiring harnesses, seed tube sensors, rate control module, electric seed meters, and active downforce system (if available) as well as for any subscription or latest firmware updates for the GPS and the in-cab display. Back up your planting data from the previous year before you begin planting this year and make sure the seeding prescriptions are ready to go if utilizing any variable-rate seeding in your operation this year. Issues with planting technology in the middle of the planting season can cost significant time and money so make sure to address any issues before heading out to the field.
7. **Variability During Planting** – As mentioned above both variable field and environmental conditions are unavoidable during planting, thus, it is critical that growers evaluate their planting conditions day to day, field to field, and especially if there are significant weather events (such as temperature changes or rainfall) during the planting window. These are common and will require **adjustment to planter settings based on the existing in-field conditions**, with special consideration to variability in soil texture, moisture, and/or crop residue. Most growers usually plant two to three varieties on their farm so any change in cotton varieties, specifically in seed size, would also require adjustments to seed meter settings and vacuum to ensure good seed singulation with minimal skips or doubles.

Remember you only get one chance to place the seed and close that furrow properly, so consistent and regular checks during planting are important to ensure that the planter is operating at peak performance in each field and throughout the whole planting window.

Thrips Management (*Phillip Roberts*): Thrips infest seedlings the day of emergence and remain a threat to yield until cotton reaches the 4-leaf stage and is growing rapidly. Thrips infest all cotton planted in Georgia every year. On cotyledon cotton, thrips feed on the underside of leaves which will cause a "silvery" sheen on the underside of the cotyledon. More importantly, thrips deposit many eggs in the cotyledons. These eggs will hatch in 5-7 days depending on temperature and immature thrips will move to the terminal and feed on unfurled leaves. This is one of the biological reasons a 1-leaf foliar spray for thrips perform so well. As true leaves unfurl and expand, damaged leaves will be crinkled and distorted. Excessive injury causes stunting and reduced yield potential and in severe cases plant mortality. Since thrips are so predictable, preventive treatment is recommended at planting.

Preventive insecticide treatments include AgLogic applied as an in-furrow granule, imidacloprid or acephate applied as an in-furrow liquid, or commercial seed treatments (primarily imidacloprid). In-furrow applications typically provide greater and longer residual control of thrips compared with seed treatments. ThryvOn varieties also provide excellent thrips protection.

Supplemental foliar sprays may be needed for thrips if infestations are high or environmental conditions are not conducive for uptake of the at plant insecticide. The threshold for thrips on non-ThryvOn cotton is 2-3 thrips per plant with immatures present. The presence of immature thrips suggests the preventive insecticide is not providing control. A rapidly growing seedling can better tolerate thrips damage. It is also important to note that seedlings are most susceptible during early growth stages. For example, seedlings in the 1-2 leaf stage are at greater risk to yield loss than seedlings in the 3-4 leaf stage. On ThryvOn cottons, do not use thrips counts to determine the need for a supplemental foliar spray. We have never observed a need for supplemental foliar thrips insecticide on ThryvOn cotton, even when threshold counts of thrips are exceeding the recommended threshold for non-ThryvOn cottons. The threshold for thrips on ThryvOn cotton is to treat if excessive plant injury is present and immature thrips are present.

Cotton Jassid Update (*Phillip Roberts*): We have been actively searching for cotton jassids since Christmas. We have been sampling winter annual weeds, cover crops, and many additional habitats and have not detected jassids as of this writing. As many are aware we monitor yellow sticky cards for whiteflies every week and we observed in 2025 that jassids may also be detected on these sticky cards. We have only captured a single jassid in late January this calendar year. We also have placed potted cotton plants on pivot points in several locations to serve as sentinel monitoring plants, and no jassids have been detected. What does this mean? Are we looking in all the wrong places? Did we observe winter mortality?

We do anticipate we will have jassids in 2026. The question is when. We are hopeful 2026 will be like 2025 in that jassids infest cotton during July and August. Growers who managed jassids in 2025 handled the pest and growers will only be more prepared as we face this challenge in 2026. We can assure you that we will continue to be looking for jassids as we move forward. It will be important that we monitor known host plants such as okra in the coming weeks. The initial detections in 2025 occurred on okra and it seems plausible that is where we will initially detect jassids in 2026. Time shall tell.

Important Dates:

Georgia Cotton Commission Mid-Year Meeting - Statesboro, GA – July 29, 2026
Attapulgus Research and Education Center Field Day – Attapulgus, GA – July 30, 2026
Southwest Research and Education Center Field Day – Plains, GA – August 5, 2026
Southeast Research and Education Center Field Day – Midville, GA – August 12, 2026
Cotton and Peanut Research Field Day – Tifton, GA – September 2, 2026
Georgia Cotton Commission Annual Meeting and UGA Cotton Production Workshop - Tifton, GA – January 27, 2027