UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION

UGA Cotton Team Newsletter
September 2026

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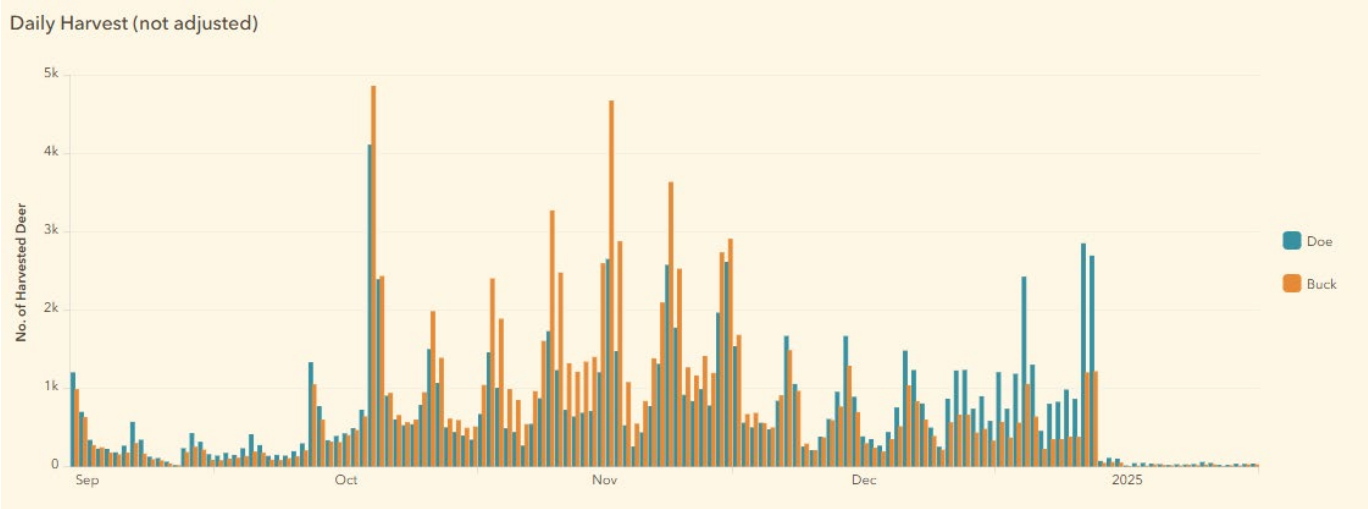
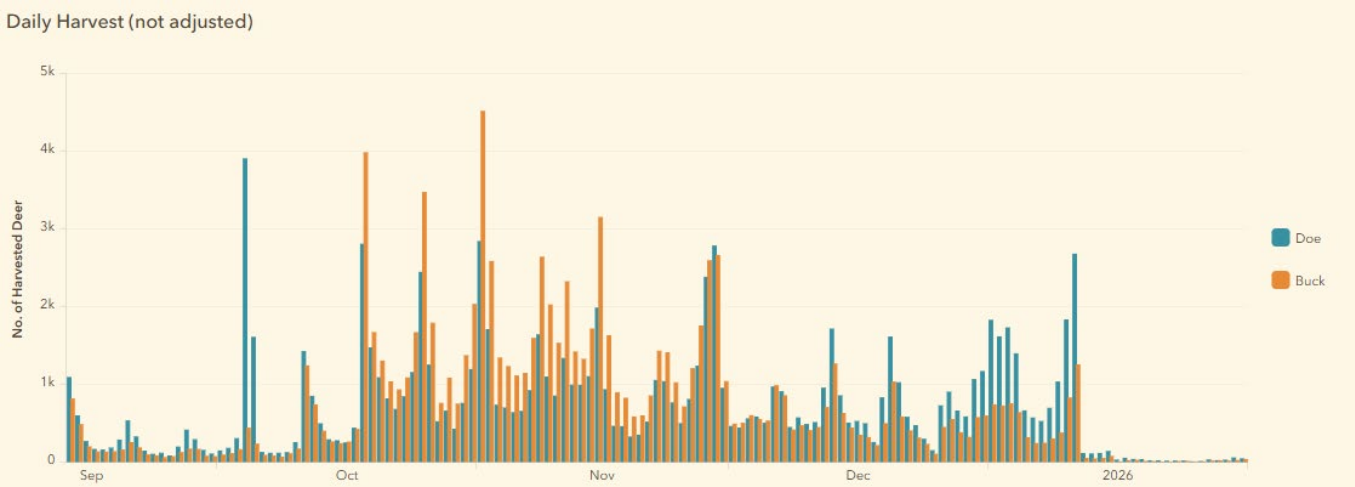
A Win for Deer Herd Management is a Win for Growers (*Camp Hand*): As most of you are aware, we have been working hard to try and get growers some help with respect to the deer issue. While we are still doing research on management tactics in cotton and other crops, there have been some big strides made by Georgia DNR that I think can help us out in the agriculture industry. One of the biggest successes in my opinion was the implementation of the antlerless only modern firearm weekend during bow season. Below are the deer harvest data over the last two deer seasons:

2024-2025



2025-2026



This antlerless only firearms weekend was clearly taken advantage of by hunters last year, and it appears that it had an "additive" effect in that more does were harvested in addition to what hunters already do (approximately 7,000 more does harvested in 2025-2026 than the previous season). This season, the antlerless only firearm weekend is October 3 and 4, with the following Monday returning to bow season. The main goal is to encourage the utilization of the Hunter's for the Hungry Program, but if you hunt on your land or lease land to hunters, encourage them to take advantage of this particular weekend!!! A rundown of which counties are eligible for this particular weekend can be found here. Plant more cotton and harvest more does!!

5Rs of Risk Management: A Framework for Understanding Risk and Resilience (*Yangxuan Liu*): If risk alone determined outcomes, farms facing the same market conditions would experience similar results. Yet, that is clearly not what we observe in practice. Some farms remain resilient during difficult times, while others struggle under the same economic pressures. Understanding why requires looking beyond the risk or shock itself and examining the accompanying decision process.

To help explain this process, I propose **Liu's 5Rs of Risk Management Model**, a framework that explains how risk is transformed into outcomes. The model consists of five stages: **Risk → Recognition → Resources → Response → Resilience.** Each stage plays a critical role in determining how individuals and organizations navigate uncertainty.

Risk refers to the external sources that generate either threats or opportunities. Examples include commodity price volatility, weather events, rising input costs, policy changes, and trade disruptions.
Recognition describes how risk is perceived, identified, and interpreted. Two producers facing the same conditions may perceive the nature or severity of a risk very differently. The same risk doesn't look the same to everyone. Some people are naturally more cautious, while others are more comfortable taking risks.

In behavioral economics, this is called risk preference, whether someone is risk-averse, risk-neutral, or risk-seeking. These differences influence how people view the same situation and the decisions they make.
Resources represent the capacity available to respond. These include financial capital, information, management skills, technology, insurance coverage, policy support, and broader institutional support. Resources determine which responses are feasible.

Response refers to the actions taken. These may include adjusting marketing strategies, controlling costs, diversifying enterprises, altering investment timing, or adopting formal risk management tools.
Resilience is the resulting outcome. It reflects the ability to withstand disruption, adapt to changing conditions, and recover over time. Resilience is not a fixed trait of a farm or firm; it is the cumulative result of the entire pathway from risk to response.

The key insight of the 5Rs model is that outcomes are not determined by risk alone, but by the full chain of interpretation, capacity, and action that follows. For producers, lenders, advisors, agribusiness managers, and policymakers, the 5Rs of Risk Management provide a practical lens for understanding performance differences under stress and identifying opportunities for improvement. In this sense, understanding risk is necessary, but understanding the pathway from risk to resilience is essential.

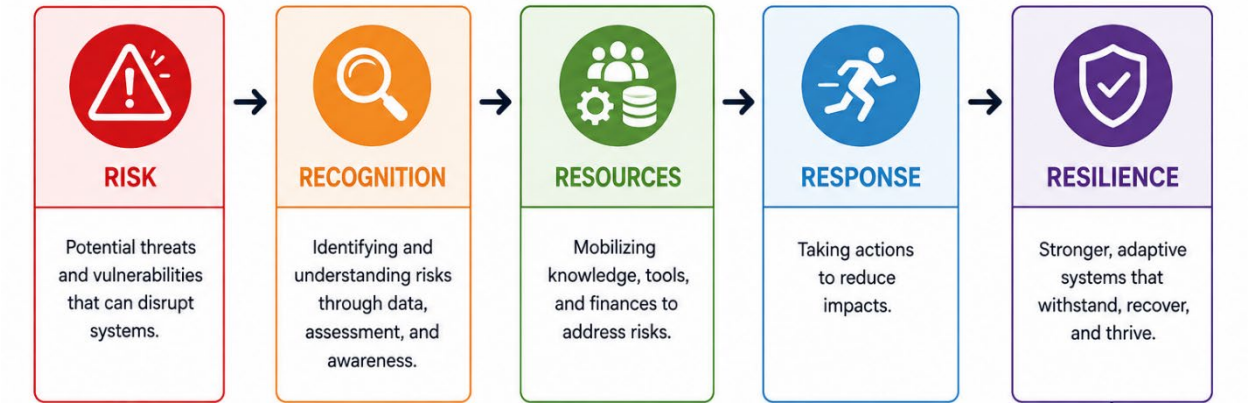


Figure 1. Liu's 5Rs of Risk Management: From Risk to Resilience (Designed with ChatGPT)

Cutout and Agronomic Maturity (*John Snider, Amit Godara, and Camp Hand*): As I write this newsletter, the growth stage of the cotton crop in Georgia varies significantly from place to place. Even within my small research program, I have some late planted cotton that only recently reached cutout, and at other field sites, the crop is ready for defoliation. In this last newsletter of the year, I'd like to take this opportunity to define cutout, illustrate how we can visually identify it, and discuss some practical considerations that require an understanding of when cutout occurs. Similarly, the concept of agronomic maturity will be discussed, including its definition, how we can identify it, and why that matters.

Cutout
Just in the interest of making sure that I consulted the literature on the topic and wasn't simply parroting what my colleagues and mentors have told me over the last 19 years or so of my life, I looked up a few

different references. These included a couple of peer reviewed journal articles written by well-respected cotton researchers and extension specialists, publications from the National Cotton Council in the Cotton Physiology Today series of articles, and other extension publications on the topic. The definitions I came across included the cessation of effective flowering, the end of the boll loading period, and the point in the season where new vegetative growth ceases. To understand how all these things may be interrelated, it is important to understand that cotton is an indeterminate plant, and the production of new fruit is tied to production of new vegetative growth as well. As a physiologist, one of my favorite definitions of physiological cutout is that it is *the point in the season where the assimilate demand of growing bolls prevents any new vegetative development*. At this point, the crop is entirely limited by assimilate supply, which can be roughly estimated by measuring whole-crop growth rates. If we were able to measure growth rates of just developing bolls and of the entire crop (leaves, stems, squares, flowers, bolls, branches, etc.) on a daily basis throughout the growing season, the point in the season at which the boll growth rate equals the growth rate of the entire crop is physiological cutout. At this point, the demand for assimilates from boll growth leaves nothing left over to drive new vegetative growth or to drive new fruiting site production that could develop from that growth.

Defining when cutout occurs is important because this information can be used to make practical management decisions, but if we have to go out every day and measure crop growth rates, it isn't very practical for anyone trying to grow a crop. As a result, over several decades, scientists have linked a simple measure of the number of mainstem nodes above a first position white flower (NAWF) to the timing of physiological cutout. Depending on what part of the cotton belt or world the information comes from, most reports indicate that cutout happens somewhere between a NAWF value of 3 and 5. If new vegetative growth has truly stopped, there likely won't be more than six days difference between these two extremes since a new first position flower is produced every three days. In Georgia, the general rule is to consider NAWF = 3 as the visual indicator of cutout (Figure 1). This is based on published data from Georgia, but the simple explanation for why Georgia tends to be more conservative in their definition of cutout is because we grow a lot of dryland cotton and are blessed with a long growing season. As a result, a crop at 5 NAWF with a lot of growing season in front of it may actually start putting on more vegetative growth and fruiting sites if conditions improve and assimilate supply increases. This is obviously less relevant for the time this newsletter is going out (discussed further down). Another term most of the readers of this newsletter will have heard is "blooming out the top" (Figure 2). Although it isn't as precise as getting out and counting NAWF on a representative number of plants in a field, it is a lot simpler to assess at 65 mph. A few weeks ago it became such a common pastime of mine to identify fields that were blooming out the top that my wife and I would race to yell "Cutout!" when we saw a field with open flowers at the top of the canopy. Canopies that are blooming out the top are probably slightly past the exact date of cutout, but it is certain that the crop is putting everything it can into boll growth, and it is not producing new fruiting sites.

Why does cutout matter? The open flowers present at cutout will be the last to produce bolls that could contribute meaningfully to economic yield at harvest. As a result, pest management efforts for boll feeding insects will need to be continued until the boll has reached a stage that it is no longer vulnerable (One example is 25 days for stinkbugs). Additionally, from the date of cutout, a boll requires approximately 850 DD60s to reach agronomic maturity. This is an important consideration because this

newsletter is going out right around the last effective bloom date for Georgia cotton (Between September 1st and 15th). This means that even if plants are not technically at physiological cutout at this point in the season, flowers produced after this date range *may* not accumulate enough heat units to mature and contribute economically to lint yield. Some refer to this as "seasonal cutout" as it is driven by environmental constraints to growing season duration and not necessarily the physiological balance between vegetative and reproductive growth. Ideally, physiological cutout would be reached before the last effective bloom date. A well-managed cotton crop with high yield potential at cutout will have a combination of bolls that have reached their final mass, bolls that are just beginning to fill out, and bolls that are somewhere in between. As a result, it is important that we don't impose undue stress on the crop at this time, but there are opportunities save water by making science-based end-of-season water management decisions, which will likely be covered by Dr. Porter.

Agronomic maturity

Put simply, agronomic maturity is when the crop is ready for the application of harvest aids. Ultimately, the crop is said to be at agronomic maturity when yield and fiber quality are maximized and when the crop is at a stage that is responsive to harvest aids. The first step in making a decision to apply harvest aides is to determine if the crop is at agronomic maturity, and there are three methods that are typically used. I personally would recommend using a combination of these approaches, with the sharp knife method always acting as a type of final check. The first method is the percent open boll method. Currently, the recommendation is to apply defoliants when the crop is at 60 to 75% open boll. The second method is the Nodes Above Cracked Boll (NACB) method. NACB refers to the number of mainstem nodes between the uppermost first position cracked boll and the uppermost harvestable boll (Figure 3). There is generally a strong relationship between NACB and percent open boll, where NACB = 4 roughly equates to 60% open boll. Finally, the sharp knife method is just what it sounds like. Let's say that the crop meets one of the previously mentioned thresholds, but we want to make sure that the uppermost harvestable bolls are of sufficient maturity for the application of harvest aids. The best approach is to use a sharp knife to cut the boll in cross section as shown in Figure 4. The fiber should string out when the knife is pulled through, and a fully mature boll will have a clearly define seedcoat, there should be no liquid inside the seed, and the cotyledons will also be visible inside the seed. Assuming the crop is defoliated on time, it should be ready for harvest approximately two weeks later. Fiber quality parameters like micronaire can be penalized if defoliation occurs too soon. Additionally, fiber uniformity and color can degrade if harvest is delayed for several weeks after defoliation. As with all things cotton, timeliness is key.

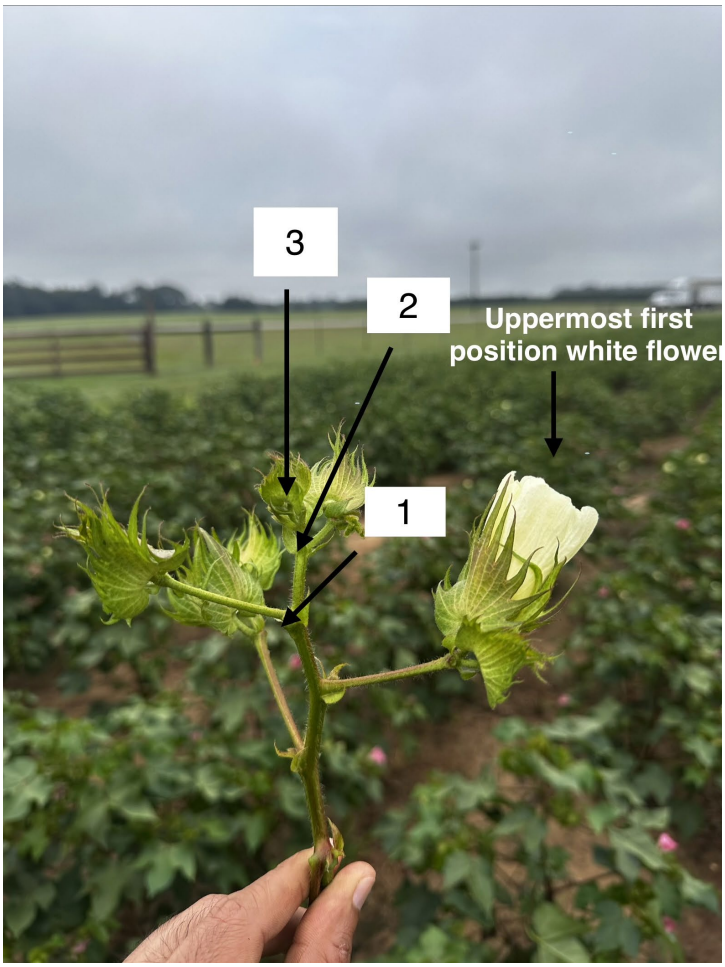


Figure 1: Cotton plant at physiological cutout, with three nodes above white flower (NAWF). Photo by Amit Godara.

Figure 2: Cotton field at physiological cutout. Photo by Amit Godara.

Figure 3: Cotton plant at NACB = 4.

Figure 4: Mature boll in cross section showing that cotton fiber "strings", the seedcoats are well-developed, no liquid is present inside the seed, and cotyledons are apparent inside the seed. Photo by Joshua Lee.

Terminating Insecticide Applications (*Phillip Roberts*): The decision to terminate insect controls can be challenging in some fields but a few basic considerations will assist in that decision. When evaluating a field a grower must first identify the last boll population which will significantly contribute to yield (bolls which you plan to harvest). In some situations the last population of bolls which you will harvest is easy to see (i.e. cotton which is loaded and cutout). In others, such as late planted cotton, the last population of bolls you will harvest will be determined by weather factors (the last bloom you expect to open and harvest based on heat unit accumulation). Once the last boll population is determined the boll development or approximate boll age should be estimated. Depending on the insect pest, bolls are relatively safe from attack at varying stages of boll development.

The table below list approximate boll age in days which bolls should be protected for selected insect pests. Cooler temperatures will slow plant development and subsequent boll age values may increase in such environments. It is assumed that the field is relatively insect pest free when the decision to terminate insecticide applications for a pest is made.

Insect Pest(s)	Approx. Boll Age (days)
Tarnished Plant Bug	15
Stink Bugs	25
Sucking Insects whiteflies aphids	harvest (honeydew accumulation on lint)

So, what about terminating insecticide applications for cotton jassid? We are still evaluating insecticide termination rules for cotton jassid. We know that excessive jassid injury significantly reduces the photosynthetic capacity of affected leaves and we must maintain functioning leaves to finish or mature bolls in the top of the plant. The difficult part is knowing when to stop or terminate insect controls. In 2025, we encouraged growers to protect cotton until we were 20 percent open. This was based on our observations that a heavily infested field could go from green to red in as little as two weeks. Fields which are 20 percent open are about 2 weeks from 60 percent open which is when you could defoliate. In 2025, we also learned that jassid damaged leaves could be defoliated if the damaged leaves were not desiccated. Based on our experiences in 2025 we are encouraging growers to protect cotton from jassids until the field is cutout (NAWF ≤ 3) and has some open bolls. We also assume you are well below the threshold of 1 jassid per leaf at the time you make the decision to terminate insecticides. If you exceed the threshold at cutout, a timely insecticide application is still needed. This guideline is basically the same as when you terminate irrigation or foliar disease control.

End of Season Cotton Irrigation Management (*Wes Porter*): This article is similar to a blog post I wrote a few weeks ago that can be found here for further information: https://precisionagirrigation.extension.uga.edu/2026/08/end-of-season-cotton-irrigation-management/. As we move through September, as is typical, we have observed adverse weather conditions across the state. In some places, we have been receiving rainfall on an as needed basis to allow us to apply minimal irrigation, however, there are other parts of the state that we cannot keep up with the water demand of the crop. When you ask around, some areas have missed most of the rainfall and have been in a dry period for weeks or more. It seems like we will have some hard rainfall for a few days then go a week to weeks without significant rainfall. This is making it tough to plan, complete sprays and field work, and stay on top of irrigation management. While the price of cotton has increased recently, economics are still tough. One input cost, especially at the end of the production season that can make a significant difference in profitability is irrigation. Currently, we are at about $9/ac-in for electrical pumping costs and around $22/ac-in for diesel pumping costs. Thus, especially if you are pumping with diesel, the decision on when and how much to irrigate or not to irrigate should be made with confidence and careful consideration.

Based on the current date this was due (Sept. 8), and estimated planting dates, we are ranging from irrigation termination to being in the peak water requirement period across the state and spread of planting dates. Earlier planted cotton is at or beyond the recommended irrigation termination period. Where cotton

planted during May and June falls somewhere between moving into and out of the peak water requirement period. The 8-week bloom period on cotton aligns with its peak water requirement, thus, when scouting your field and looking at planting date, estimate which week of bloom you are in and ensure that you are matching irrigation to the requirements. Also, keep in mind that the UGA Checkbook was developed based on historical average ET data, and that recently we have been much hotter than average, so actual water requirements are most likely higher than reflected in Figure 1.

As the crop moves through the weeks of bloom and begins to approach the 8th week of bloom, it is time to start monitoring the field for maturity and specifically scouting for cutout. Table 1 corresponds to Figure 2 or the image of the cotton plant (Both developed by Whitaker et al. 2019) and represents the value of seed cotton and fiber by location on the cotton plant. The short conclusion to this is that the majority of value from the cotton plant comes from the first position bolls developed on nodes 10 and below. Value by location is important when discussing irrigation termination and defoliation. In this case we are going to focus specifically on irrigation termination. As most who work with cotton know, the first bolls that we will rot, or lose are typically the bottom bolls. Thus, we want to manage our irrigation so that we do not make increase the likelihood of disease causing boll, yield, and profit loss. Additionally, upper bolls developed later in the season do not require the resources to finish off, or depending on when they were set on the plant may have no chance of finishing a fully developed boll by the end of the season and will just become a resource sink, without profitable return on investment.

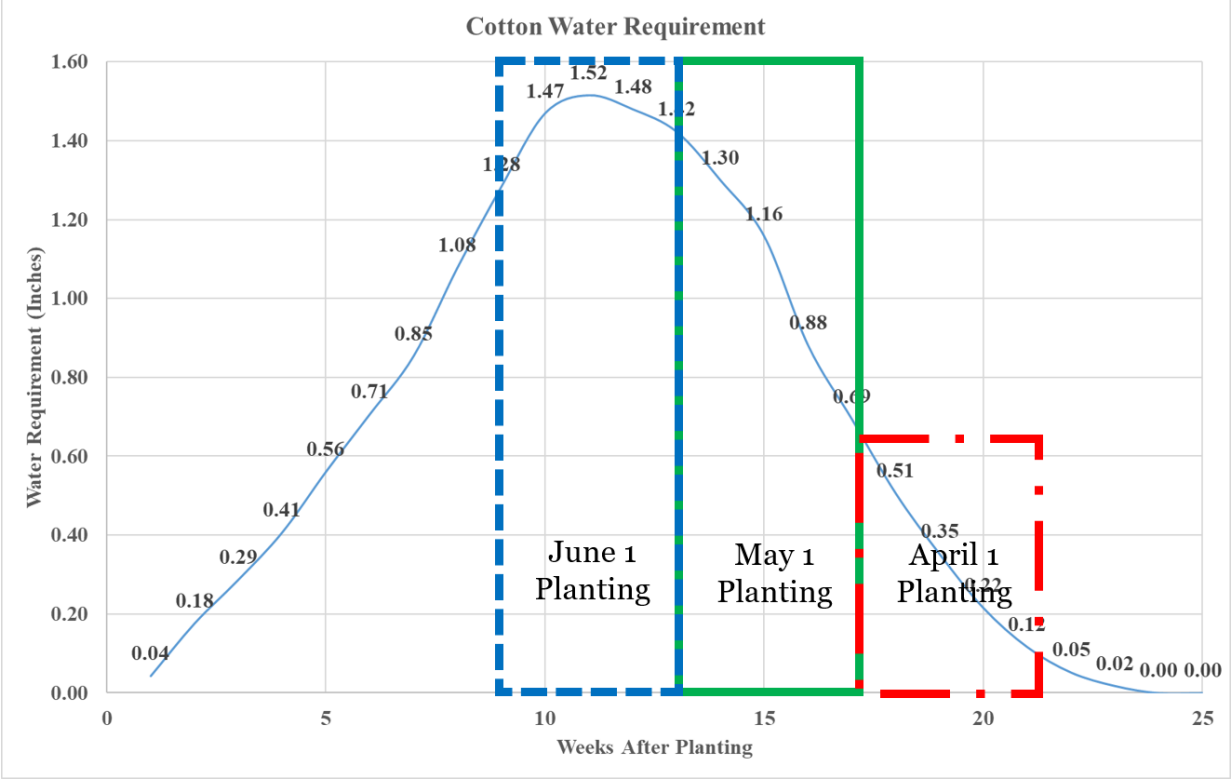


Figure 1. Cotton water use curve with the estimated planting dates highlighted.

Table 1. Boll location as a percentage of fiber value on a standard cotton plant.

Fruiting Location	Percentage Value of Fiber
1st Position Bolls	72%
2nd Position Bolls	18%
3rd Position Bolls	5%
Vegetative Branches	5%
Node Location	**Percentage Value of Fiber**
Nodes ≤10	60%
Nodes 11-15	31%
Nodes ≥ 16	9%

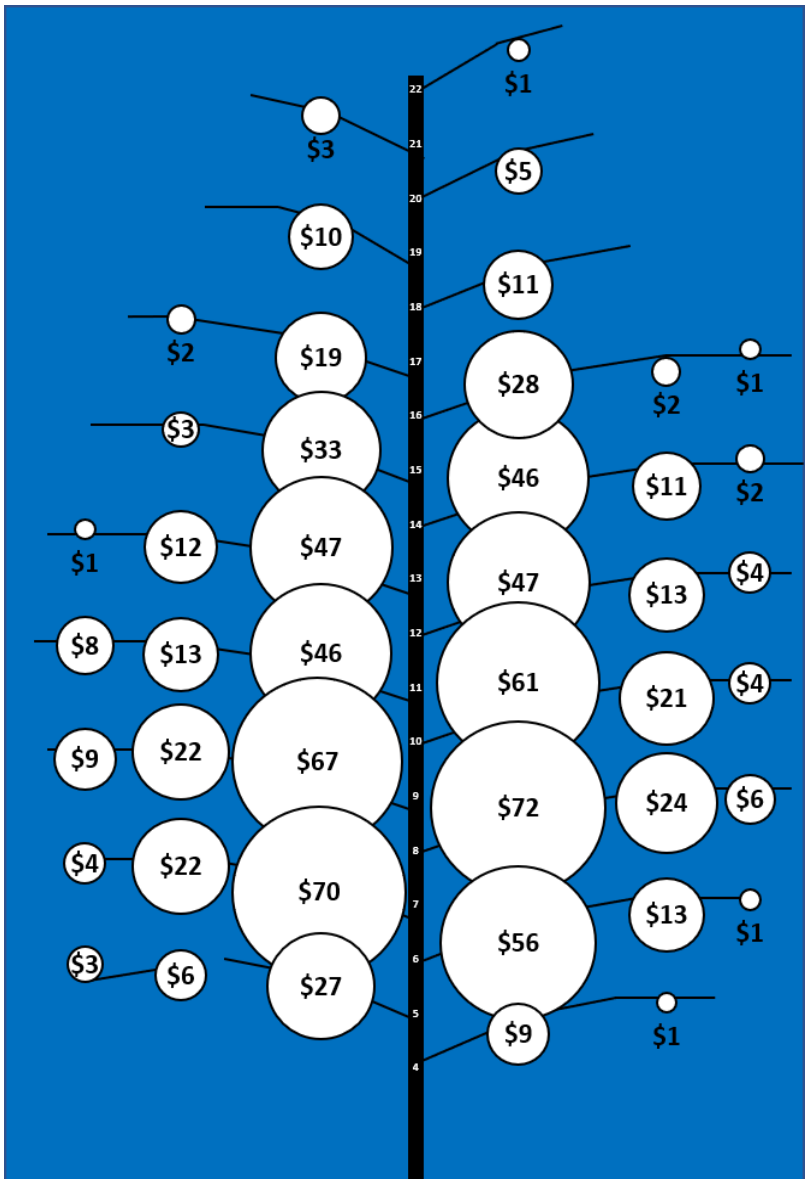


Figure 2. Boll location as a percentage of fiber value on a standard cotton plant.

Cotton Irrigation Termination

Multiple studies have focused on determining the appropriate timing for irrigation termination and the conclusions from those studies agree that terminating at crop cutout provides no difference in yield from terminating later in the season. These studies have shown differences from $3/acre up to $85/acre of additional input costs from unnecessary irrigation later in the season. Thus, based on these studies, irrigation termination from both the yield and profit standpoint have shown that cutout is the optimum timing. It should be stated and noted that all of these studies had adequate soil moisture at the time of termination. Thus, ensure that you are managing your irrigation adequately up to this point and make a final decision as you approach cutout based on weather predictions, irrigation, and estimated soil moisture

on when you should terminate irrigation. If you have questions about if you have adequate soil moisture please reach out to your local UGA County Agent.

When determining cutout, that can come at different stages based on season, variety, and growth characteristics. An article shared to me by Camp Hand from Cotton Physiology Today does a very good job of explaining how to document time to cutout in the crop. Typically, we use a rule of thumb of 3 nodes above white flower (NAWF), but as stated earlier and in the linked article there are factors that influence maturity such as early season stress like we observed during June when it became hot and dry again. The figure below shows multiple cases of cotton maturity moving into cutout.

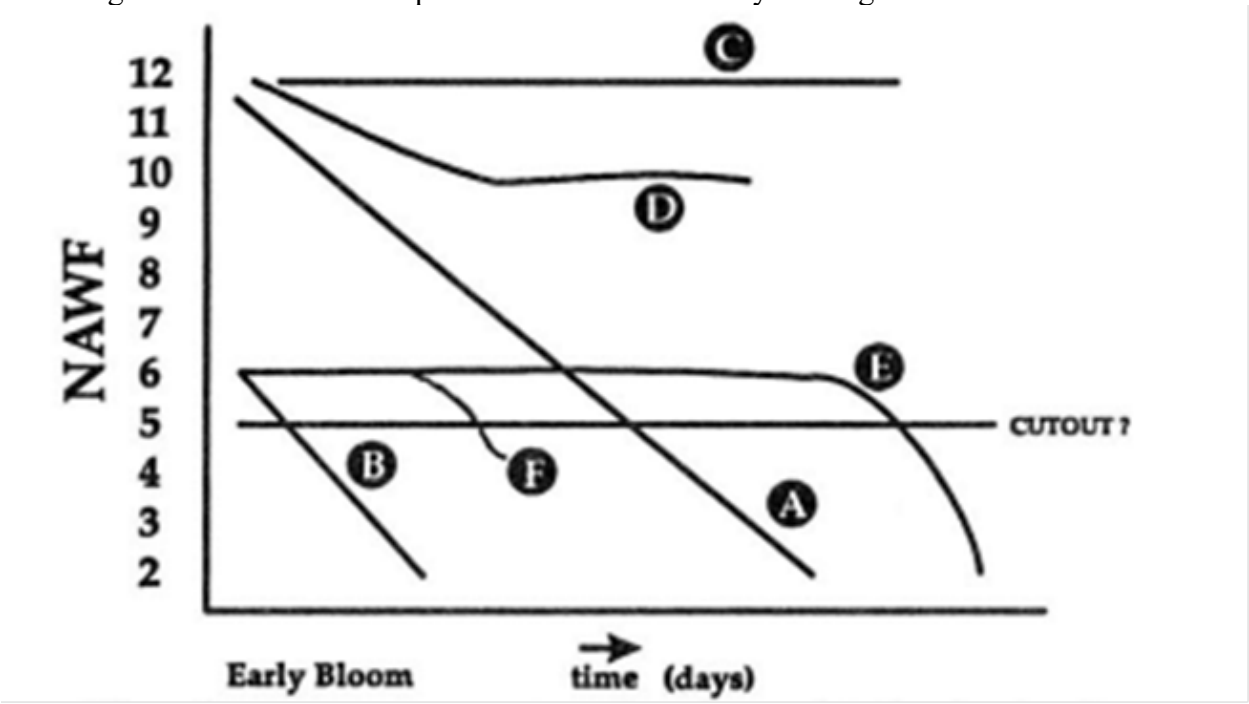


Figure 3. Node above white flower and estimation to crop cutout.

We have had an adverse season, with periods of drought, extreme rainfall, followed by more drought. In most cases we have observed the subsoil moisture being depleted and not replenished. This puts us in a tough place; it is very difficult if not near impossible to replenish soil moisture levels deeper than 12 inches with irrigation in most cases. Mature cotton plants extract moisture fairly evenly across their rooting profile, but since we are only able to replenish moisture in the top portion of the soil profile with irrigation. Thus, as you progress through bloom and approach cutout, it is important to work to refill the profile as much as possible. This can be accomplished via similar methods that were discussed in the post: https://precisionagirrigation.extension.uga.edu/2026/08/extreme-heat-and-irrigation-dont-let-your-crop-get-behind/. I would encourage you to maximize irrigation efficiency, perform back-to-back irrigation events as necessary to refill the profile, and monitor responses.

From the 2026 UGA Cotton Production Guide Page 152: A final irrigation event is often applied when the crop begins to open. Commonly, NO additional irrigation is applied once the crop reaches 10% open boll

to minimize problems with boll rot, hard lock, light spot, and other fiber quality issues. Additionally, a multi-year study which is published, has shown no effects on yield when irrigation was terminated during cutout (NAWF = 3) versus 10% open boll.

Thus, the current irrigation termination recommendation is at 10% open boll, but I would encourage you to monitor your field, and consider terminating irrigation around cutout, and if you are not comfortable with that yet, at a minimum do not apply irrigation after you have documented open bolls in your field. You should manage soil moisture up to cutout at an adequate level and ensure you have sufficient soil moisture before making the final irrigation termination decision.

If you have further questions about end of season irrigation and irrigation termination on cotton, reach out to your local UGA Count Extension Agent.

East Georgia Cotton Update and Defoliation Trial (*Wade Parker*): The cotton condition in east Georgia is a mixed bag. This is one of those years that it depends on where you are standing, if you want to answer accurately. Very much needed rainfall has fallen this past weekend, which will help late planted cotton but also hinder cotton that was opening or has been open for a while. Our early planted cotton was hurt by prolonged periods of dry weather, especially in the central part and due east of our district, which is now opening at a fast pace. Boll rot is also wreaking havoc in early May and now some mid-May planted fields. Overall, I would rate our crop as average or slightly below average. The later planted cotton and harvest conditions will determine the outcome.

With the arrival of fall, comes the thought of spraying and smelling cotton defoliant. While deciding the best defoliant recipe is important; knowing when to defoliate is also very necessary. Will Brown and I coordinated a defoliation timing trial, in which four timing treatments were evaluated: 2 weeks early (20% open boll), on time (60% open boll) 2 weeks late (80% open boll), and 4 weeks late (100% open boll). All treatments were harvested 2 weeks following defoliation date.

The results were mixed, with the 2 weeks early treated cotton experiencing a 42% yield loss when compared to the on-time treatment *(Figure 1)*. No difference was shown when on time was compared to the two later treatments. This data shows that defoliating two weeks early is not a practical solution for any situation, as impact on yield and quality are significant. While we did not see a difference in the later defoliation treatments; our harvest weather was very favorable with few rainfall interruptions. This allowed the defoliation products to work to their full potential with very little impact on the natural boll opening process. With regards to quality, the 2 weeks early exhibited lower micronaire and discount due to immature fiber. Our current recommendation of defoliating at 60% open boll proves to remain a strong recommended practice.

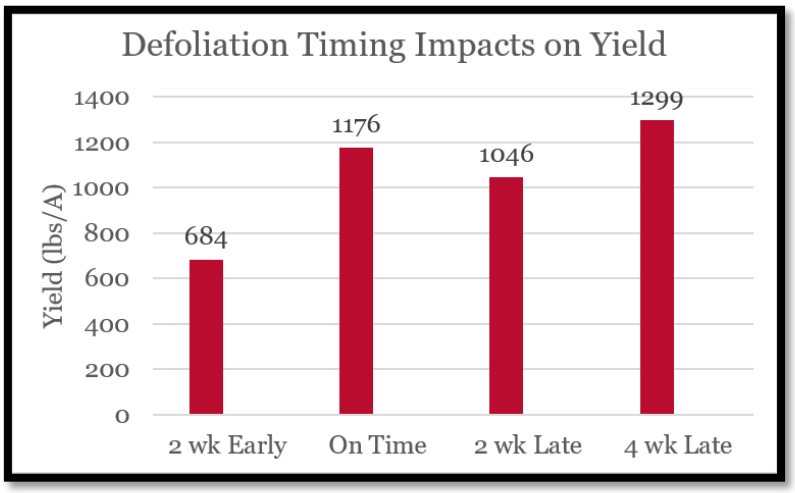


Figure 1. Impact of defoliation timing on lint yield.

The Final Push: Defoliation and Harvest Management (*Camp Hand*): It has been a winding road to get where we are today – but we are approaching the finish line and winding down 2026. The crop in Georgia is all over the board – we picked some of our first cotton on the experiment station today, and it is likely to average around 1,500 lbs. However, yesterday we were in some that will likely average around 500 lbs. Quite a swing. Most of the stuff that is struggling didn't get rain in July and it was "too little too late" in August. A few things to consider as we approach defoliation:

1. The quickest, easiest, and cheapest way out of a fight with whiteflies or jassids is to be timely with defoliation. Plain and simple. Additionally, being timely with defoliation will reduce the populations of these insects for the wintertime, thus potentially helping us with pressure felt during 2027. If we do not defoliate on time it gives these pests more time to reproduce and potentially the impacts will linger into next season. **DEFOLIATE ON TIME!!!**
2. We did some work in 2020 and 2021 reevaluating the last bloom date in Georgia. Realistically, our last effective bloom date is approximately September 15th. This means that the odds of a white flower producing a harvestable boll decline significantly if you see flowers after this date. This is important to note for the next point.
3. "Should I push this crop or go ahead and defoliate it?" This is the conversation I have had over the last week. If the "top" on your dryland cotton hasn't been blooming for at least 2 weeks I am not sure it is worth chasing. This last effective bloom date helps us determine when to cut off inputs to the crop, but even if it has been blooming for a couple of weeks, do we realistically need to keep protecting this crop from insects, diseases, etc.? I'm not sure there is much to gain there.

Most folks know what they are going to do defoliation wise, so I'm not going to list a bunch of products and rates and such. I actually send out an email to our agents once a week with suggestions on rates and other considerations, so if you want that info please reach out to your local UGA County Extension Agent.

Two other points: at some time we are allegedly going to enter a "Super El Nino" pattern which is supposed to mean it will get wet this fall. That would NOT be good. Thus, we need to ensure we are timely with defoliation and harvest, particularly as we have some drier weather. Some of our defoliant products require a 24 hour rainfree period (thidiazuron). This can be cut to 12 hours when mixed with a phosphate (i.e. tribufos), but 12 hours of guaranteed dry time is hard to come by in many situations right now. The other thing is to optimize defoliant performance I really like a few days of sunshine following a defoliant application (at least 3 days). As we are getting into it and starting to knock the leaves off of some early cotton these things need to be considered.

Last thing – do not be surprised when we knock the leaves off of some early May cotton if you see some boll rot. I have seen quite a bit of it over the last few days. Also, on some of our later planted cotton, we may have a few missing positions in the top due to this overcast weather over the last few weeks. I hope I am wrong, but it is certainly possible.

Everyone stay safe during harvest and I hope it goes smooth and is bountiful. As always, if you ever need anything please don't hesitate to reach out.

Getting Ready for Cover Crop "Season" (*Taylor Singleton*): With harvest fast approaching, that means it's time to start thinking about plans for planting cover crops this fall. If you're an experienced cover crop user, you know that planting cover crops is more than just throwing some seed out – it requires a complete rethinking of how you approach your production system. Depending on your current practices, it *may* require a change in timing, logistics, and priorities surrounding fertilization, equipment, weed management, planting, and harvesting. If you're new to cover crops and interested in trying some out on your operation, it's best to ease in slowly on a small area until you are comfortable with the changes. Some things to keep in mind:

1. **Understand goals** – Clarify what you want to achieve through using cover crops, whether its mitigating erosion/runoff, suppressing weeds, boosting soil health, or just keeping the soil covered during the offseason.
2. **Start small** – Try it out on a small area to begin with and increase your acreage as you get more comfortable. If you have a small field that you see often or have an area that's prone to erosion/runoff/leaching this is a great place to start. To really get a good understanding of how to make these practices work, it's most helpful to be able to closely observe the site throughout the year.
3. **Easy entry points** – If you can, pick a field that will allow you to have "extra time" to plant and manage your cover crop. This might be a field that you harvest first or plant later…giving you some wiggle room in the "in-between crops" period that improves flexibility and helps you see what needs to be adjusted for next time.
4. **Select compatible species** – Considering what crop you are planning to plant next, keep species selection simple to begin with. Rye/oats/other small grains are a great place to start (*cheaper $*), before trying more complex species mixtures (*more expensive $$$*). Match the species to the goals you want to achieve (ex. weed control = high biomass cover crop, etc.).

5. **Understand agronomic practices** – Once you select your species, adjust your seeding rates based on your planting method (broadcast vs drilled). Keep an eye on the weather and hold off on planting until adequate soil moisture is present. Overseeding into standing cash crops (before harvest) is an option, however this will introduce another level of complexity that must be considered (cash crop maturity, potential for seed to reach the soil, etc.). Drilling the cover crop will provide the best seed to soil contact after the cash crop has been harvested.
6. **Understand termination** – In the spring, don't let termination slip up on you….understand when the cover needs to be terminated based on the relationship between the cover crop species selected and the upcoming cash crop. When the cover is terminated will influence how much biomass/residue remains when it's time to plant the cash crop, so keep equipment considerations in mind and level of comfort when starting out.

Most folks in cotton/peanut rotations utilize cereal rye, oats, or wheat as their cover crop of choice. Each of these small grain species are relatively cost effective, produce sufficient biomass in our environment, and generally shape up into a nice conservation tillage production system in the spring.
For more information about each of these species, check out these fact sheets by the Southern Cover Crop Council:

Cereal Rye – Link
Oats – Link
Wheat – Link

Just like yield with a cash crop, we want to manipulate our cover crop to maximize growth potential in the time it's in the ground – more growth *generally* means greater benefit to our system (i.e. biomass, weed suppression, soil erosion prevention, etc.). This means it's important to think about species selection and a realistic timeline for how many days we expect to have that cover in the ground for – before we plant the first seed.

To be successful, we need to understand how much time we reasonably have between harvesting our 2026 cash crop/planting our cover crop, and when we intend to terminate before next year's cash crop planting (2027). With an understanding of when we intend to plant the cover and when we will terminate before the next crop, will that leave enough days for the species we select to accumulate enough biomass for us to get our money worth? Here's a couple of planting/terminating window scenarios:

Cover Crop Planting Date	Termination Date	Growing Window (Days)
October 15	March 15	150
October 15	April 15	180
November 1	March 15	135
November 1	April 15	165
November 15	March 15	120
November 15	April 15	150
December 1	March 15	105
December 1	April 15	135

Understanding how many days we are working with can help us make sure we select a species (and variety) that fits our window and serves our goals. Just keep in mind, your cover crop is not going to be growing the whole time it's in the ground – you will see early season growth before the temps turn off cold, then growth with start again in the spring. Generally, the more time you can give that cover crop to grow in the spring (warming temps, longer days, rapid growth), the more biomass you will generate. Unless you are terminating ahead of corn, I'd encourage you to consider holding off on terminating until closer to planting the cash crop (even though it's tempting to just terminate everything in March while there's time!).
For example, the most common variety of cereal rye we see in Georgia is *Wrens Abruzzi*, which matures around ~150 days. An earlier maturing variety such as *FL401* (~125 days) may be a better fit for a tighter planting window. Pay attention to what variety you are planting to maximize your investment. Best wishes for a safe and productive harvest season.

Important Dates:

J. Phil Campbell Cotton Production Field Day – Watkinsville, GA – September 29, 2026
Georgia Cotton Commission Annual Meeting and UGA Cotton Production Workshop - Tifton, GA – January 27, 2027