

TALKIN' COTTON

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The continued hot and dry weather is causing stress in all dryland cotton, and even some irrigated fields. This stressed cotton is at the cutout stage in many areas, and yield potential will be further limited if rainfall is not received soon. Cutout is defined as when the plant slows vegetative growth and transfers most of its energy into boll development. It is officially determined when the top of the plant is within 4-5 nodes of the uppermost first position white bloom, but it can also be easily determined when we start observing blooms in the top of the plant. Producers refer to this as “blooming out the top”. In healthy plants the nodes above white flower should be seven or eight at first bloom, and decrease by approximately one node per week during blooming. We have not only been observing this in dryland cotton, but also in irrigated cotton when water is short or root growth has been inhibited. In some fields, we are observing what an extension specialist in Louisiana refers to as suspended cutout. The nodes above white flower stays the same, and the plant continues to fruit for several weeks. If these fields are irrigated, irrigation scheduling may need to be evaluated, if the fields are getting plenty of water, the next thing to look for is a nitrogen or other nutrient deficiency caused by a restricted root system. In these situations, a foliar nitrogen application could extend fruiting allowing the plant to hold onto one or two more bolls. For dryland fields, about all we can do is “hunker down” and wait for rain. A rainfall soon will cause some drop of small bolls that already were going to shed, but new growth will initiate and new squares and blooms will develop in the top of the plant. These new squares need to be on the plant by mid August to produce a harvestable boll.

