

TALKIN' COTTON

By Dr. J.C. Banks

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It is about the time of year to consider harvest aid applications. The period of cloudy days in late August plus cooler than normal temperatures have made timing of the harvest aid application a moving target. I observed some fields in early September that when I used the cut boll technique and nodes above cracked boll, I estimated that they would be ready for harvest aid application about the middle of September. These fields are not ready yet, and may not be ready for a couple of weeks. When our late August cloudy and rainy period occurred, we expected and received a heavy fruit shed of bolls from flowering until they were about thumb sized. After this fruit shed, the plant had a lot of squares that would have normally been shed later due to fruit load, but stayed on the plant because a portion of the fruit load had been lost due to the cloudy days. At this time, these squares are mid to full sized bolls, and will contribute enough to yield that they are worth keeping. Even though many of the bolls are near full sized, these bolls will not be fully mature until early to mid October. This is especially critical in dryland areas because dry weather prior to late August had limited boll set, and the young bolls will be a significant portion of total yield. In some fields I have observed, the difference between a thumb sized and a full sized (but not yet mature) boll is about 8-10 days. In dryland areas this year, many small sized bolls in the lower and middle part of the plant had stopped development due to the drought, and unfortunately, these bolls will not start developing again. There is nothing we can apply to the plant to start these bolls growing again, so our yield and quality will depend on late and warmer than normal fall weather to mature the crop. We've had these weather conditions in two of the last three years, so again, we are betting on these conditions to deliver a good yield for the state.
