

2004 PEANUT, COTTON, AND TOBACCO PERFORMANCE TESTS

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The Season

Growing conditions across the state continued to be favorable for good row crop production, with adequate moisture and moderate temperatures during the growing season. Conditions were too dry for ideal early season planting (statewide, this was the driest March in 110 years of records, with rainfall at only 12% of normal). Late season planting was held up a few weeks in late June by excessive moisture, but the overall status of the crops was very good for the second consecutive season.

Rainfall amounts recorded monthly at the five test locations in Georgia during the 2004 growing season are presented in the following table. The primary weather feature of this growing season was the once-in-40-year hurricane event, in which the remnants of three hurricanes (Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne) moved across Georgia in September, resulting in flood and wind damage. Statewide, this was the wettest September in 110 years, with rainfall 8 inches above normal; some locations received torrential downpours. When averaged across all five sites, the 2004 growing season rainfall was 9% more than normal.

2004 Rainfall¹

Month	Athens ²	Attapulgus ³	Midville	Plains	Tifton
	----- inches -----				
March	0.87	1.33	0.37	0.21	0.42
April	0.96	2.91	2.21	2.41	3.98
May	3.41	1.44	2.37	1.84	2.32
June	6.52	7.89	7.33	8.32	11.25
July	3.41	2.85	2.68	3.85	2.30
August	3.28	5.79	8.11	5.15	2.14
September	12.98	8.23	9.05	12.30	14.58
October	1.00	2.63	0.91	0.61	1.03
November	9.32	6.87	1.62	3.34	4.01
Total	41.75	39.97	34.65	38.03	42.03
Normal (9 mo)	36.76	38.74	33.95	35.29	35.11

1. Data provided in part by Dr. G. Hoogenboom, Georgia Station, Griffin, GA
2. Plant Sciences Farm.
3. Attapulgus Research Center is nearest location to the Bainbridge site.

Georgia farmers increased acreage of most crops during the 2004 season, the second year in a row of increased crop acres after a seven year downward trend. Peanut producers increased planted acres 12%, while cotton and tobacco acres declined 3 and 12%, respectively.

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Overall the 2004 growing season was a successful one for Georgia producers but difficult situations did occur from extremely dry conditions in March to tropical storms from three hurricanes during September. The harvest season had a timely beginning but quickly fell behind due to tropical downpours and wet soils. Cloudy wet weather continued during the fall and the delays caused many problems for producers, decreased crop quality, and increased losses from wind and rain. High wind and rain increased 'string out' and blown out cotton, while peanut producers experienced losses after digging in wet heavy soils. All of our sites in the variety testing program experienced some weather related damage and reduction in yield, but the one with the most consequences was the irrigated peanut test at Tifton. The yield potential of this experiment was reduced due to excessive rainfall from the three tropical storms during September which decreased the effectiveness of the fungicide program and from waterlogged soils culminating in early leaf drop in September.

610,000 acres (12% increase over 2003) of peanuts were planted and per acre yield this season is set at 3,000 pounds (much better than expected), but 13% less than the new state record set last year. Production reports of 1.83 billion pounds for peanuts is a two percent decline from last year. Cotton production exceeded expectations as 1.75 million bales were harvested, 17% less than in 2003. Tobacco planted acres declined slightly (3000 acres less) during 2004 and the 59.4 million pounds produced was a 21% decline from last year.