

Aug. 2, 2011— Peanuts

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Peanut Irrigation and Diverting Water

Producers in the southern counties of the South Plains have already made decisions to terminate irrigation water to cotton in order to sustain peanuts. USDA-RMA issued letters to this effect about 3 weeks ago. Recent evapotranspiration at Lamesa for the 30 days beginning June 21 demonstrated average daily water use in peanuts at 0.41" per day, which would require ~5.8 gpm/acre IF your irrigation system was efficient. Conventional wisdom suggests that this still may be inadequate though since no peanut fields are currently lapping, water use actually still might be at or below this level.

Reports from central and northern counties do not note the concerns with pegging in peanuts (it is occurring and appears adequate) where irrigation is good. Terry, Yoakum, Dawson, and Gaines Counties are experiencing widespread retarded pegging. Typically in these areas a peg needs to be in the ground by about August 15th to have a high probability of making a harvestable peanut.

Field observations from July 26 in Gaines Co. noted about 50 to 65 pegs that have penetrated the soil per foot of row (but less than 10% of those actually had pods on them). This does not bode well for yield potential although what happens between now and mid-August will influence the outcome. Seven and 10-day forecasts, however, don't promise much break from the heat or for rain. Recalling former state peanut specialist Dr. Robert Lemon's writings about 1998, which was excessively hot in May and hot and dry into July, much of that year's peanut crop was saved by high pegging in the first two weeks of August. Overall yields ultimately were good, much better than expected. One runner field in Gaines Co., about 12" wide down the row, had many flowers, but essen-

tially no pegs. Will this field make anything? If water is intensified, perhaps, but it is uncertain. Data from other U.S. peanut production regions suggest that only about 20% of flowers produce harvestable peanuts. Farmers should check pegging periodically. Nothing short of irrigate, irrigate, irrigate is going to produce a crop this year. The amount of pegging we can get in the next 2-3 weeks will go a long way toward determining how well our 2011 peanut crop does. As much as drag sock irrigation is water efficient, if you have concerns about pegging in your fields, you need to switch to nozzles.

Should farmers terminate irrigation on some peanuts? Agronomically, on some fields, probably yes. But crop insurance rules will dictate farmers' options, and at this point though no farmers have indicated they are concentrating water on reduced acreages of peanuts, it is feasible to believe this may be a good agronomic option. As for overall yield potential, the high price of peanuts makes an acre of production, even if only 2,000 lbs./A, highly valuable.

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