

# Mississippi Sweetpotato News

## Summer 2013

### Mississippi Sweetpotato Crop Report (7-31-2013)

Benny Graves, Executive Director  
Mississippi Sweet Potato Council

Well it is the beginning of August and the Mississippi sweet potato crop is in the midseason growth stage. Overall the crop is in good shape and growing well. By late July, finally, all acres have gotten a good soaking rain followed by some sunshine and cooler temperatures. Plant growth conditions have been good and some early blocks are starting to size up small potatoes. Due to good growing conditions we may have a few limited acres ready for harvest the last week of August, but most of the crop will not reach maximum yields until mid- September or later.



I would say at this point that 80% of the crop is in good shape with 20% being “skippy” or experiencing other problems. Common problems observed are nutgrass or other weed issues, reniform nematode damage, and poor plant survival on dry late planted acres.

Planted acres for Mississippi came in at 18,450 acres or 18% less than last year. North Carolina planted acres are down 8,000 acres to around 54,000. The NC crop is late and has struggled due to heavy rains. Louisiana planted acres are also down 2,500 to around 7,500 acres.

Insect pressure has been light to moderate at this point in the season. Cucumber beetles, some cut worms, and a few army worms have been treated in some fields. White fringed beetles have been observed in a few fields.

At this point in the growing season growers need to protect their sweet potato crop potential by paying close attention to individual fields. Watch for drainage issues, weed breakthroughs, insect pressure, and deer/hogs.

## Pest Management Considerations

Stephen L. Meyers  
Regional Sweet Potato Extension Specialist  
Mississippi State University- Extension Service

Somewhere between the mad dash of planting and the anticipation of the fall harvest, you may find enough time to take a deep breath or two. If you can, now is a good time to reflect on the season thus far and to take notes on how to improve your pest management moving forward.

**Weed escapes:** Weed escapes are common in most crops. They become exceptionally difficult in sweetpotato production because of the lack of registered herbicides for postemergence broadleaf weed control. There are a number of reasons weeds can make it through herbicide applications.

- The preemergence herbicides (namely Valor, Command, and Dual Magnum) used in sweetpotato require rainfall or irrigation for activation. If weeds emerge before rainfall moves the herbicide into the soil, control is reduced.
- Excessive rainfall can also result in breaks in weed control by promoting successive weed germination events and moving herbicide either deeper into the soil or off the shoulders of the bed.
- Assuming rainfall activates your soil-applied herbicide(s), control can be compromised by premature cultivation. Cultivating fields with limited to no weed pressure early in the growing season exposes seeds deeper in the soil to ideal germination conditions nearer the soil surface. If herbicide activity has been good, wait to cultivate. Data from the past 20 years of weed control research in sweetpotato indicate that a cultivation event between 3 and 4 weeks after planting is ideal **if** early residual herbicide applications have been successful in holding weeds back. This delayed cultivation could be followed with a broadcast layby application of Dual Magnum which (assuming an activating rainfall occurs) can help fields remain clean until vine closure.
- The final common reason for weed escapes simply comes down to mode of action. Most herbicides are selective in which weeds they control or suppress. Knowing which weeds are present in a field and selecting the right herbicide are important. This year many production fields had coffeeweed (hemp sesbania) and copperleaf standing tall above the sweetpotato canopy. While Command and Dual Magnum (or Lasso/Intro) control numerous weed species, neither provides satisfactory control of these weeds. Currently, Valor is your best bet for controlling coffeeweed and suppressing copperleaf. Unfortunately, not every troublesome weed in sweetpotato has a registered and effective herbicide.



**Nematodes:** Reniform nematodes have been documented in a number of MS sweetpotato fields this year. It would be easy to link increased nematode concerns this year with the inability to apply a preplant application of K-PAM because of the wet spring. However, fumigation should be thought of as a short term solution to a long term problem. One of the best options to address increasing nematode pressure is crop rotation. Unfortunately, nematodes enjoy a field of cotton and soybeans as much as they do sweetpotato. Those who can rotate nematode-pressured fields to corn, sorghum, or peanut should give it serious consideration. Doing so would not only help reduce nematode populations, but may help to put a dent in nutsedge populations, as corn is a much better competitor with nutsedge than sweetpotato. For more information on nematodes, nematode sampling, and nematode soil sample forms, visit [msucare.com/lab/](http://msucare.com/lab/).

### **Tips for a Safe Harvest Season**

John Hubbard, Senior Safety Specialist  
Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation

With the much-awaited sweet potato harvest nearing, the inherent risk of injury to farm workers and damage to equipment should be on the minds of producers. These risks can be addressed by following some simple steps:

- Equipment maintenance – be sure shields and guards are in place.
- Address any slip, trip, or fall hazards.
- Be aware of your surroundings and know where everybody is when moving equipment.
- Never leave running tractors unattended.
- Do not wear loose-hanging clothes around moving equipment.
- Use proper lifting techniques to prevent injuries.

Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation offers a variety of safety programs. If you are interested in booking a program for your farm workers with a Mississippi Farm Bureau Safety Specialist, please call 601-977-4242 or 1-800-227-8244, ext. 4242.

#### **Sweetpotato Field Day- Pontotoc Ridge-Flatwoods Branch Experiment Station**

The 2013 Sweetpotato Field Day is scheduled for Thursday August 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Pontotoc Ridge-Flatwoods Branch Experiment Station in Pontotoc, MS. Please see the field day program attached to this newsletter for more information. Please, make time to attend this important field day. For more information on the Field Day, contact Stephen Meyers via email ([smeyers@ext.msstate.edu](mailto:smeyers@ext.msstate.edu)), office phone (662-489-4621), or cell phone (765-412-2908).

Want to see this newsletter in color? Send an email to [smeyers@ext.msstate.edu](mailto:smeyers@ext.msstate.edu) or visit [msucare.com/crops/sweetpotato/index.html](http://msucare.com/crops/sweetpotato/index.html)

**WHAT: Sweetpotato Field Day**  
**WHERE: Pontotoc Ridge-Flatwoods Branch Experiment Station**  
**8320 Hwy 15 S., Pontotoc, MS**  
**WHEN: Thursday August 22<sup>nd</sup> - 7:30 A.M. through lunch**

**FIELD DAY SCHEDULE**

7:30-8:30 Registration

8:30-8:45 Welcome and opening remarks.

**Stop 1 Production Information/Research**

9:00-10:00

Double Planting Row and Drip Irrigation

-Ramon A. Arancibia, Research Assist. Professor, NMREC-MAFES

National Sweetpotato Collaborator Group Variety Trial

-Ramon A. Arancibia, Research Assist. Professor, NMREC-MAFES

Evaluating Technologies to Reduce Slip Sunburn at Planting

-Jeff Main, NMREC-MAFES

Evaluating Biofungicides for Tip/End Rot Suppression

-Jeff Main, NMREC-MAFES

Sweetpotato Undercutter Demonstration

-Jason Ward, MSU Ag. & Bio. Engineering

**Stop 2 Pest Management**

10:00 -11:00

Evaluation of Sonar for Weed Control in Beauregard and Orleans Sweetpotato.

-Stephen Meyers, Sweetpotato Extension Specialist, MSU-ES

Know Your Sedges

-Mark Shankle, Research Professor, MSU-PSS/MAFES

Sugarcane Beetle Control

-Larry Adams, Entomologist, USDA-ARS

Dual Magnum and Storage Root Initiation

-Issah Abukari, Ph.D. Graduate Student, MSU-PSS

Briggs Boom Demonstration

-Billy Black, High Tech Equipment Sales

**Stop 3**

11:00-12:00

**Other Updates**

Mississippi Crop Update

-Stephen Meyers, Sweetpotato Extension Specialist, MSU-ES

Louisiana Crop Update

-Mavis Finger, LSU-AgCenter

End/Tip Rot Update

-Beth Stokes, MSU-Plant Pathology

Four Year Results of the NSCG Variety Trial in Mississippi

-Jeff Main, NMREC-MAFES

Discussion of topics of interest (if time allows)

**12:00 noon    Lunch (provided by Valent U.S.A. Corp.)**