

Mississippi Sweetpotato News

Fall 2013

Mississippi Sweetpotato Crop Report (10-20-2013)

Benny Graves, Executive Director, Mississippi Sweet Potato Council

As of October 20th, 65% of Mississippi's sweet potato crop has been harvested. I am pleased to report that the quality of this year's crop is better than the past several years. Yields for most fields have remained strong. As we move into harvesting some of our later set fields, I expect to see a higher percentage of jumbos. The focus now for farmers is to harvest the remaining acres as soon as possible and get them into storage in good condition.

I have received numerous reports that the new variety Orleans has produced excellent yields of #1 potatoes. This new variety seems to be a keeper.

The movement of sweet potatoes in the month of October has been strong. Thanksgiving sales should kick in and provide above average movement. U.S. demand for sweet potatoes has been exceptional. The market continues to signal that it needs sweet potatoes.



The Mississippi Sweet Potato Council sponsored a sweet potato booth at the 2013 Produce Marketing Association's Fresh Summit Trade Show October 19-21 in New Orleans, LA. Several Mississippi Grower/Packers attended the show. Produce buyers and merchandisers from all over the U. S. and the World were in attendance. We continue to expand our markets for Mississippi Sweet Potatoes through participating in major events such as this important produce show.

Updates from Pontotoc

Stephen L. Meyers

Regional Sweet Potato Extension Specialist, Mississippi State University- Extension Service

Much has happened since the last newsletter....

On August 22nd MSU held a Sweetpotato Field Day at the Pontotoc Ridge-Flatwoods Branch Experiment Station. A good mix of producers, crop consultant, industry representatives, media personnel, and University research and extension faculty were on-hand to hear presentations on research from MSU and USDA-ARS scientists. Attendees also had the opportunity to see Briggs Boom and undercutter demonstrations.



Also in August, sweetpotato joined the list of crops on the Mississippi Crop Situation Blog. The Crop Situation Blog provides current production-related information for row-crop stakeholders. Visit the blog at: Mississippi-crops.com. There you can also sign up to receive a weekly email with a list of each week's posts.

Recently, the National Sweetpotato Collaborators Group was notified that it is the 2013 recipient of the Award for Excellence in Multi-State Research from the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. The Collaborators Group is a working group comprised of university research and extension personnel, USDA researchers, and sweetpotato stakeholders from across the United States (including MSU), Canada, and U.S. Territories that meets annually to address the most pressing research-based needs of the U.S. Sweetpotato Industry. The Group is collectively responsible for variety development and evaluation and advances in production and pest management practices, post-harvest handling, and sweetpotato physiology. U.S. sweetpotato productivity has incrementally increased nearly every year since the Group's first meeting in 1939, reaching its current record high of 418 bushels per acre in 2012 (nearly 4.5 times the yields when the group was founded). The group boasts well over 1,000 refereed and extension publications (including a comprehensive postharvest disease compendium and a new sweetpotato disease compendium) and 94 released varieties. The group, now in its seventy-fifth year, represents the most organized and systematic approach to sweetpotato research and extension in the world.

August 31, 2013 marked the official end of a large, multi-state USDA-Specialty Crop Research Initiative grant; *Participatory modeling decision support for improving sweet potato production efficiency, quality, and food safety*; that was a collaborative effort among researchers

at MSU, Louisiana State University, NC State University, and the University of California Cooperative Extension Service. The project began in 2009 during the National Sweet Potato Council Convention where a survey was given to over 600 U.S. sweetpotato producers in an effort to understand the industry's most pressing needs. Now that the grant period has officially ended, it is time for another survey to determine the impact of the research conducted. The survey is four pages long and can be completed anonymously. I have committed to having a minimum of 30 of the surveys completed by Mississippi producers by December. In the coming weeks, look for me to be asking 30 of you to complete the survey.

As the harvest season winds down, I want to thank the sweetpotato stakeholders of Mississippi for their participation in on-farm research. This year MSU conducted at least 12 on-farm studies with at least 10 different sweetpotato growers evaluating production and pest management programs. On-farm research provides MSU researchers with a real-world production environment and allows growers a first-hand and up-close look at research as it happens.

Scurf Abundant in Some Fields

Stephen L. Meyers

Regional Sweet Potato Extension Specialist, Mississippi State University- Extension Service

Each year some sweetpotato scurf, or “soil-stain”, is reported. However, this year it would appear that the disease has been more prevalent than normal. Scurf is caused by a soil-dwelling fungus, *Monilochaetes infuscans* and results in darkened, discolored skin. The affected portion of the root can range from a small patch to nearly the entire storage root surface. The injury is considered by most to be superficial because the sweetpotato flesh below the stained skin surface is normal, and the sweetpotato maintains the same eating quality.



Here is what you need to know:

- The fungus associated with the disease has a narrow host range- namely sweetpotatoes and morningglories.
- The fungus can survive 1-2 years in the soil.
- The fungus is primarily spread on plant material- infected roots that are bedded for seed, for example.
- The pathogen can spread from infected roots to nearby healthy roots when stored under conditions of high humidity.
- In storage, scurf-infected sweetpotatoes lose water faster than healthy sweetpotatoes.

How to manage scurf:

- Use scurf-free sweetpotatoes for seed.
- Treat seed roots with Mertect and/or Botran before or at plant bed establishment.
- Establish plant beds in fields with a scurf-free history.
- Cut slips at least 1” above the soil surface. Pulling slips is a good way to move this and other pathogens into the production field and should be avoided.
- In problematic fields, avoid planting sweetpotato for at least 2 years. Rotating out of sweetpotato for up to 4 years may be necessary if the pathogen is well-established.
- Control morningglory weeds, especially in rotational crops, to avoid providing the pathogen with a host in non-sweetpotato production years.
- When possible, avoid storing scurf-invested sweetpotatoes in bins of healthy sweetpotatoes.

Save These Dates

Vardaman Sweet Potato Festival

The Festival is November 2 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Enjoy lots of good food, family fun, and of course sweet potatoes! For more details visit vardamansweetpotatofestival.org.

Sweet Potato Festival Banquet

The harvest banquet is scheduled for November 9 at 6:30 pm at the Vardaman High School gym. Tickets are \$20 and available at the door. Come out and celebrate the harvest!

52nd Annual United States Sweet Potato Convention

The Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission will host the U.S. Sweet Potato Convention January 19-22, 2014. The meeting will be held at the Royal Sonesta Hotel- New Orleans, LA in the historic French Quarter. Hotel reservations can be made by calling 1.800.SONESTA and using the group code “United States Sweet Potato Council”. For more information and to print a registration form, visit sweetpotato.org.



MS Farm Bureau Federation Winter Conference

The Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation Winter Commodity Conference will be held on January 27-28, 2014 at the MFBF office on Ridgewood Road in Jackson. The forestry and land session will be held the morning of the 27th. The row crops session (including the sweet potato breakout session) will be held the afternoon of the 27th - beginning at 1:00 p.m. The livestock session will be held the morning of the 28th. Producers are welcome to attend any parts of the conference they would like. There is no registration fee to attend, and everyone is welcome. For more information contact Samantha Webb Laird at swebb@msfb.org or 601.573.7913.

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