

# Optimistic outlook at US Beltwide Conferences

By Owen Taylor

The mood was generally optimistic at the US Beltwide Cotton Conference in early January — and attendance was up about 10 per cent over 2003.

But despite high yields in most areas and stronger prices, many US growers are on the ropes, and it will take a string of good years to keep them in the ring. We continue to hear about a few people who won't be farming in '04.

One recurring concern is the high price or steep share arrangements for rented land. And many landowners will likely see stronger commodity prices and/or the farm program as a reason to resist giving tenants better terms.

As usual, the Beltwide highlighted a whole raft of new products and ideas targeted to the cotton industry.

## BIOTECHNOLOGY

Monsanto's Bollgard II will be more widely available in 2004, and VipCot Bt technology from Syngenta and Widestrike Bt technology from Dow are on the horizon.

California — with less worm pressure — has seen little need for Bt varieties. That may change with more liberal plowdown guidelines in the pink bollworm program. Varieties with activity on lygus would fit well in California cotton, but nobody is promising that kind of tool anytime soon.

## CHEMICALLY SPEAKING — NEW TOOLS AND NEW USES

It also was interesting how many companies brought new insecticides to the Beltwide or predicted introductions in 2005.

- **Bayer** announced that its next-generation LibertyLink herbicide, Ignite, will be available for use on LibertyLink cotton and as a preplant burndown and hooded sprayer material in conventional cotton. Ignite controls a wide spectrum of weeds, said Andy Hurst, cotton herbicide product manager. Five FiberMax varieties will carry the LibertyLink trait in 2004.

Bayer also said its new whitefly and mite material, Oberon, will likely receive EPA approval and be available for the 2005 season. Bayer also hopes to gain a corn label for Oberon.



US farmers are concerned with spiralling land rents.

- **Crompton** hopes to gain registration for its new IGR, Diamond, for the 2004 use season. Diamond offers a broader control spectrum than Dimilin, the company's established IGR, said Crompton's Tim Weiland. It also has low impact on birds and fish and quickly degrades in water.

Diamond already is sold in the ornamental market under another name. Like Dimilin, it's a chitin inhibitor. It works mainly through larval ingestion but has some contact activity, he said. Diamond is active on a wide range of foliage feeders and affords some suppression of thrips.

- **Dow** expects registration in early 2004 for Prolex, its new generation pyrethroid that was developed in a joint venture with Cheminova. Prolex should be labeled a broad spectrum of cotton pests, including thrips, lygus, bollworms, budworms and stinkbugs.

- **Nichino** goes into 2004 with an expanded label for ET, its herbicide/defoliant. The broadleaf material can be used as a preplant burndown material and also as a layby treatment in a hooded sprayer. Nichino hopes to obtain a further label expansion to allow it in shielded sprays for the upcoming season. There is no preplant interval, so it can be applied in an early burndown spray or at planting to clean up lingering weeds.

- **Syngenta** introduced Envoke, which has gained registration in the Midsouth and Southeast for 2004. The ALS inhibitor controls a wide range of weeds, including morningglory species, sicklepod, nutsedge, hemp sesbania, cocklebur and pigweed species, among others. It's labeled for application from the five leaf stage through layby. It has both contact and systemic control with residual activity.

- **Valent** announced that it expects to obtain a second registration for use of Valor in post-directed and shielded sprayer applications in cotton. The label, which the company hopes to gain in time for the 2004 crop, also will allow Valent to shorten its preplant application interval for Valor from 30 days to as little as 14 days, depending on rates and tillage methods.

The company said the product would likely be used in directed and shielded sprays with glyphosate or MSMA. Valent also indicated that its new miticide, Zeal, has received EPA registration and is being registered in various states now. Zeal inhibits the molting process and has some ovicidal activity. It does not kill adult mites.

## ON THE ELECTRONIC FRONTIER

- **Agriplan** brought new software to the Beltwide that allows growers to merge

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yield data from two or more cotton pickers and generate a single map. The program also compensates for multiple picker calibration, where one machine registers a little more or less yield than another one.

- **John Deere** unveiled its Harvest Doc system for cotton, using microwave-based yield sensors to measure yield flow for monitoring and mapping. The system eliminates or reduces the need to drill holes in ducts for installation.

Because there is no sensor in the chutes, the Harvest Doc system also does not impede the flow of cotton. The new system allows growers to use Harvest Doc hardware and software they may already own for yield monitoring in grain crops. The sensors will be available in limited quantities in 2004 and then go into full production for 2005.

- **Continental** discussed its Eagle Eye trash measurement and lint cleaning system, which is still under development. A camera linked to a computer constantly monitors trash levels.

The system automatically adjusts the number of louvers needed to attain the minimum amount of trash specified by the operator.



John Deere unveiled its Harvest Doc system.

#### COTTON VARIETIES: MORE CHOICES, BETTER QUALITY

- **Delta & Pine Land** came to the Beltwide emphasising quality, particularly its DP 444 BG/RR, which will be available in quantity for 2004. The variety, positioned for the Midsouth and Southeast, offers “vast potential for improvement of micronaire

and other fibre quality traits,” DP&L’s Tom Kerby said. The company also will have limited quantities of DP 432 RR, which was the highest yielding Roundup Ready variety in DP&L’s trials in 2003.

- **FibreMax:** The company continues to emphasise quality. It’s also going into the new season with five LibertyLink vari-

eties as Bayer — a partner in the FiberMax venture — introduces Ignite, its next-generation LibertyLink herbicide.

- **Phytogen:** Phytogen continues to position itself as a coast-to-coast player. On the western side of the Belt, it's introducing the first Roundup Ready Pima along with a Roundup Ready Acala and a new conventional Acala with improved yield and quality characteristics.

It also will be shipping new Roundup Ready varieties adapted to the Midsouth and Southeast. This is the first round in a multiple-variety introduction schedule that will stretch out over the next few years, the company said.

- **Beltwide Cotton Genetics** will introduce BCG-28R in the Midsouth, positioning it as an option in Bt cotton refugia acres. BCG varieties with both Roundup Ready and Bollgard traits are anticipated. The company is a sister company of Delta King Seed Company, and both are owned and operated by Lawhon Farm Services in McCrory, Arkansas.

#### IMPROVING QUALITY

Several speakers said that more needs to be done to improve the overall quality of US cotton. When the subject came up in some of the sessions and out in the halls,

the FiberMax brand was singled out as an example of varieties that are delivering a better product.

- Webb Wallace, a consultant and private researcher in Harlingen, Texas, said that numbers have improved at the classing office in Corpus Christi, and he gives credit to more FiberMax acreage.

- David Parvin, Mississippi State University ag economist, said that one grower he's working with in a row-spacing study has shifted to FiberMax varieties and has routinely received a premium.

- Bayer markets FiberMax varieties in a joint venture with Cotton Seed International, the Australian company that developed the initial varieties marketed here. As it happens, while I was at the Bayer booth picking up some information, a representative with one ag distributor dropped by to find out what data was available on FiberMax varieties in California trials. He said he was "looking ahead" to see if there was a place for the varieties in the company's marketing plans.

- Not everyone has had a consistently positive experience with FiberMax varieties. Dawn White, a consultant and grower in Bishopville, S.C., said their initial experience with FiberMax varieties were very positive. But they also had one field

that was a total loss after rain, humidity and heat took its toll on the fibre.

#### DEERE INTRODUCES A HEADER FOR ALL WIDTHS

For 2004, John Deere will be offering its variable-width header, which is capable of harvesting anything from conventional row spacings down to 15 inch. In other words, it's a spindle picking system that can handle conventional cotton, narrow-row cotton and ultra narrow-row cotton.

The Vari-Row System (VRS) is based on Deere's PRO-Series headers, but it channels two rows of plants through each picking drum. The header can be retrofitted to 1997 and newer John Deere pickers.

To gain this flexibility, Deere added an in-line cutting unit to the right-side picking unit. As the plant enters the cutting unit, rotary knives cut the stems. The feeder, which is synchronised with the forward picking speed, holds the plant upright and gently passes it to the standing row as it enters the front picking zone.

