

PRODUCING AN EARLY CROP  
- A SHORT SEASON APPROACH

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From before the first seed is planted, everything that is done, i.e. selection of seed variety, to all cultural practices and insect control must have one aim and that is earliness. There are three main cultural practices in this area: (1) Long fallow dryland, (2) Limited water - pre-watered and one other watering (usually after the corn has been finished watering in early February) and (3) Fully irrigated.

These basic rules apply to all three methods:

1. Ground Preparation - On long fallow blocks, usually hill out in April or May. On limited water and irrigated blocks, hill out as soon as is practicable, but again as early as possible.
2. Pre-watering - All fields should be pre-watered. Our ground temperatures are only just warm enough for planting, and watering up cools the soil down too much to allow reasonable plant establishment. Also pre-watering fits into the overall weed control strategy. After pre-watering we usually use a chemical knock-down on germinating weeds. It also allows us to plant shallower and hopefully get the seedlings away to a good early start.
3. Herbicides - Early application of grass herbicides is recommended in late August to early September. Rates are usually increased the earlier the

application. Try to avoid broad acre application of broadleaf herbicides. This can cause a reduction of seedling vigour and hence problems in getting the seedlings away early. Be very aware of the effect of some of the more potent broad acre herbicides on young cotton, i.e. Diuron and Prometryn, as well as high rates of any broadleaf herbicides.

4. Nitrogen - Do not use excessive nitrogen. It is much better in a short season area to run out of nitrogen than to have too much. I follow Greg Constable's rule of thumb to the letter. Also, try to use a split application of nitrogen, though the second application should be applied before Christmas or before the first watering.

5. Planting Seed Selection - There is no other possible selection than Siokra for short season areas. It has shown to be a more vigorous seedling, and therefore must be selected for that reason.

6. Planting - Keep the planting rate up to at least 14 Kg/Ha. The time of the planting is early October - the first two weeks on a rising temperature. Sometimes we have to plant before soil temperature reaches the optimum temperature. Use band sprays of broad acre herbicide behind the planter, but do not go overboard with rates. Any herbicide damage is very detrimental. We have to use an in-furrow treatment for wireworms on all area planted. After planting and prior to seedling emergence, run over the area with a

knockdown herbicide.

7. Cultivation - This should be done as soon as is practicable, which I guess is once the seedlings are established. Remember, "There is only one place for a cultivation rig when it rains," i.e. in the shed because you have finished cultivating.

As soon as this cultivation pass with the rig has been finished, the first weed riding should follow. It is important to get over the country quickly on this pass, then follow up with another pass. Once the broad leaves can be seen above the cotton, weed riding should commence. You should aim to do at least three to four weed ridings.

8. Early Insect Control - Because of our season, early insect control is imperative. Spraying should commence as soon as thrips are present in the area and should continue until that life cycle has been completed, i.e. four sprays if necessary.

Do not be frightened to use a plane if a ground rig cannot be used. In a short season area you cannot make up the damage early insects can cause.

9. Heliothis - Heliothis control should follow the same principles as early insect control. Again, once the damage is done, you cannot make up the loss. Also, at the end of the season, you cannot save half a spray. It is also suggested not to be afraid to use ovicides. In a short season area, in order to get maximum yield, late insect control is also very important; so late

grubs have to be controlled as well. This could mean three to four sprays in Stage 3.

10. Watering - Again do this as early as possible. You must get an early growth in the crop. Also, in this area, most watering is from bores and is time consuming. The other reason for watering early is so that a mid rate of Pix can be applied between the first and second watering. (Pix has shown to have some earliness effect.) Usually watering is kept going until the third week in February or early March.

11. Defoliation - Cotton in this area never really finishes out like the northern areas. Also, the first frost is usually around the 25th April. Two of the last three years, we have had a frost on 25th April. It has become a feature to put some type of conditioner on the crops about ten days before the first frost. The crop is then left until it is 80% open before defoliation is carried out - or the first frost occurs - whichever comes first.

12. Picking - Usually only short days are available for picking due to a large number of very heavy dews. Late starts and early finishes are necessary if quality cotton is to be picked.