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**Sweet Potato Crop Update**

*Tara Smith, Assistant Professor and Sweet Potato Specialist, LSU AgCenter*

The 2009 Louisiana sweet potato harvest began in August and as of Oct. 10, approximately 40-45 percent of the crop had been harvested statewide. Harvest reports across the state have been variable. Louisiana producers in the southern production region dealt with drought conditions for much of the growing season. The lack of rainfall resulted in an undersized crop in some areas and subsequently delayed harvest operations. The situation has improved in recent weeks, and producers throughout Avoyelles, Rapides, St. Landry, Evangeline and Acadia parishes are harvesting an average crop.

Producers in the northern part of the state experienced more favorable conditions throughout the production season but have dealt with excess rainfall during the past couple of weeks. The rainfall has delayed harvest operations by two to three weeks and will also result in some crop loss in several locations in north Louisiana. The extent of the damage will be difficult to assess until conditions improve and producers have a chance to resume harvest operations.

Yields reported to date in north Louisiana have been average, and the quality of the harvested crop is good.

The Evangeline sweet potato variety, released from the LSU AgCenter sweet potato breeding program in 2007, has performed well across Louisiana this year. Due to weather issues and a reduced seed supply, producers, researchers and extension personnel had limited opportunities to evaluate the variety last year.

Yields reported to date in 2009 have met or exceeded that of Beauregard and have exceeded 600 bushels (50 pounds) per acre in some locations. The acreage planted to Evangeline is expected to increase significantly in 2010 and beyond, not only in Louisiana but across the southeastern United States.

Evangeline is a promising commercial cultivar that has a fit in both fresh market and processing venues. Beauregard remains a viable and dominant cultivar, but sweet potato producers are excited about “having a choice” and capitalizing on the attributes of both varieties to maximize the crop’s market potential.

Sweet potatoes are a high-value crop that requires tremendous inputs. Production costs prior to packing range

from \$2,500 to \$3,500 per acre in Louisiana, but returns on that investment are significant in a year devoid of weather disasters. The processing sector of the industry continues to grow and affords producers a profitable avenue in moving a greater percentage of their crop than they did in years past.

ConAgra Lamb Weston recently announced that a multimillion dollar frozen sweet potato processing facility is being constructed in north Louisiana, close to Delhi. Along with the two companies currently processing sweet potatoes in Louisiana, Allens Inc. and Bruce Foods, Lamb Weston will continue to enhance the value-added sector of the Louisiana sweet potato industry and positively contribute to the sustainability of Louisiana sweet potato production.

I wish all of you well as you complete this year's harvest and look forward to visiting with all of you at our winter meetings.

***Variety Update...Evangeline Right on Track***  
***Dr. Don Labonte***

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Evangeline was planted on approximately 1,500 acres in Louisiana in 2009. This variety is also being tested this year under material transfer agreements in Mississippi and Arkansas. This permits the growers in these locations to evaluate the variety but restricts them from using the seed for a future crop. All harvest reports to date on this variety have been very positive. Producers across the state and across the

southeastern United States have been pleased with the yields and quality they are realizing in Evangeline fields. There have been many inquiries about Evangeline seed availability, and acreage is expected to increase in 2010. In addition to fresh market venues, processors like the texture, color and taste profile Evangeline has to offer.

Several other varieties are also showing promise, and results from 2009 breeding line evaluations will be delivered during our winter production meetings.



***Evangeline test plot, 2009.***

**Market Outlook**  
***Tara Smith***

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As of October 10, 2009, only 40-45 percent of the Louisiana sweet potato crop had been harvested statewide.

The rainfall received in north Louisiana and Mississippi in September and early October has significantly delayed harvest operations. The Thanksgiving movement from Louisiana and Mississippi will be reduced as a result.

Matt Garber with Garber Farms in Iota, La., indicated the current F.O.B price for U.S. No. 1s was \$16.50-\$17.00. Price to the Louisiana grower currently stands at \$14.00 per 40-pound box of U.S. No. 1s.

Garber indicated he thought the price would hold for the Thanksgiving movement. Johnny Roy, a producer and broker in Avoyelles Parish, echoed those sentiments.

North Carolina is harvesting a good crop, and movement there may affect the price.

The Louisiana industry is optimistically hoping the yields and quality of the late-harvested crop will be good. The long-term outlook will depend on the remaining supply of the 2009 crop, following the Thanksgiving shipping period. In addition to the fresh market, movement to various processing venues has been steady and continues to be a viable option for producers to move a percentage of their crops.

**Foundation Seed Update: Foundation Seed Survey Results 2009**

***Drs. Chris Clark, Tara Smith and Don Ferrin***

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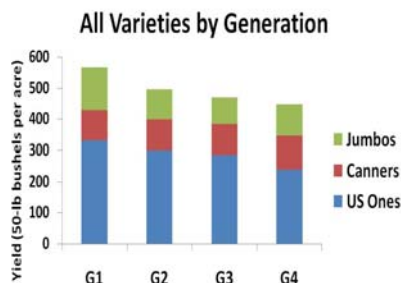
The virus-tested technology used today in the production of certified foundation sweet potato seed was integrated into the LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Foundation Seed Program in 1999.

The program has been well received, and the benefits of this technology are well known and touted in the sweet potato industry. Prior to the initiation of this study, it was not fully understood how quickly productivity decreases once the seed is incorporated into commercial sweet potato operations.

An applied survey of virus-tested foundation seed users was initiated in 2007 to evaluate the overall response of second, third and fourth generation foundation seed. Several producers in north and south Louisiana willingly cooperated with us throughout the duration of the study to make this possible.

Preliminary results from 2007 indicated that a decrease in yield is realized in G2 and G3 generation seed compared to G1 (first-year foundation seed, Sweet Potato Research Station). However, we did not detect large differences between G2 and G3 seed. Similar trends were detected in 2008 and 2009.

Cumulative yield data (2009) by generation are shown in the figure below. As you can see, both U.S. No. 1 and total yield decreased with each subsequent generation of seed. U.S. No. 1 yield decreased by 30 bushels in G2 seed compared to G1 foundation seed. Total yield was reduced by 70 and 118 bushels in G2 and G4 seed, respectively, compared to G1 foundation seed.



This study generated meaningful results, and we appreciate all producers who have collaborated with us on this study. Additional results

from this study will be shared at our winter production meetings.

### **Industry News** **USDA Sweet Potato Specialty Crop Research Initiative Proposal Receives Full Funding**

Research and extension personnel from Louisiana (LSU AgCenter), Mississippi (Mississippi State), North Carolina (NC State) and California (UC Davis) recently were awarded a \$2.8 million dollar USDA: Specialty Crop Research Initiative Grant.

The title of the funded proposal is: **“Participatory Modeling and Decision Support for Improving Sweet Potato Production Efficiency, Quality and Food Safety.”**

The LSU AgCenter will be the lead institution on this project. Work will begin immediately and will address several production issues as well as various aspects of pest management and food safety.

Stakeholders from Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, California, Alabama and Arkansas were instrumental in identifying key concerns affecting the industry at a focus group session held in December. Many of these concerns resulted in research and outreach objectives outlined in the current project.

Advisory meetings and focus group sessions will be held throughout the life of the project to facilitate communication between the industry and project investigators. We would like to

thank all of our advisory members and stakeholder organizations who supported our submission.

*A focus group session will be held during the January 2010 National Convention in Biloxi, Miss. The meeting will be held Tuesday, January 26, 2010, at 1 p.m. Please make plans to attend and participate in this session.*

### **Statewide Sweet Potato Advisory Meeting: December 2, 2009, LSU AgCenter Scott Center**

A statewide sweet potato advisory meeting will be held December 2, 2009, at the LSU AgCenter’s Scott Center in Winnsboro, La. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. and will conclude with lunch.

Last year’s meeting was well attended by producers, LSU AgCenter extension and research personnel and industry representatives. This is an excellent opportunity to network with others in the industry about key issues.

### **Louisiana Sweet Potato Association State Meeting: January 12-13, 2009, in Ville Platte**

The annual meeting of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Association will be held in Ville Platte, La, on January 12-13, 2010. This year’s meeting is being hosted by the St. Landry/Evangeline parish sweet potato association.

The meeting will take place at the Ville Platte Civic Center and we will be structured the same as in previous years.

The board meetings of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Association and Commission will take place the afternoon of the Jan. 12, and the educational program will be the morning of Jan 13. A sponsored dinner will be served at the conclusion of the board meetings, and a sponsored lunch will be served after the program on Jan. 13.

If you have any questions concerning this event, please contact Tara Smith at 318-435-2155 or Vince Deshotel at 337-948-0561. We look forward to seeing you there.

### **Mississippi to Host National Sweet Potato Convention in Biloxi**

*Benny Graves, Mississippi Sweet Potato Council*

The Mississippi Sweet Potato Council is happy to be hosting the 2010 National Sweet Potato Convention. The meeting will be held in Biloxi, Miss., at the Beau Rivage Resort.

The convention dates are January 24-26, 2010, but plan to come early and enjoy the luxury of the beachside Beau Rivage Resort.

This will be a Convention you will not want to miss. You can relax and enjoy the company of your friends in the sweet potato industry from across the nation. You will be served plenty of good food and enjoy fun activities mixed with a little business. You will not want to miss this opportunity to talk sweet potatoes with the movers and shakers of the sweet potato industry.

Mark your calendar now and reserve your room at the Beau Rivage by calling 888-383-7073. Ask for group code "U.S. Sweet Potato Council". Room rates are \$139 per night for Saturday and \$119 per night Sunday through Tuesday.

Registration packets will be mailed out in early August. But for more information now, go to [www.mssweetpotato.org](http://www.mssweetpotato.org) and click on 2010 Convention. You also can contact Benny Graves, convention coordinator at 662-325-7773.

### **Fun Facts**

- **U.S. per capita consumption of sweet potatoes increased more than 25 percent from 1998 to 2008.**
- **Over 1.8 billion pounds of sweet potatoes were produced in the United States in 2008.**
- **Value of U.S. production in 2008: \$394 million**

LSU AgCenter extension personnel are available to assist you with all of your crop needs. Please call on us if we can be of assistance.

#### **Sweet Potato Specialist**

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