



## Summer 2011

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### *In This Issue:*

- **Sweet Potato Crop Update**
- **Foundation Seed Program Update**
- **Market Outlook**
- **Weed Science Specialty Crop Research Update**
- **Sugarcane beetle research update**
- **Industry News**
- **Featured Recipe**
- **Contact Information**

### **Sweet Potato Crop Update**

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

The 2011 planting season was a challenging one to say the least. Planting began in late April and wrapped up across the state in early July. The planting season extended out longer than most producers like. In a “good” year the planting season wraps up around the third week of June.

Rainfall at the Sweet Potato Research Station totaled only 4 inches from May 1-July 1, with many production areas north and south of the research station receiving even less rainfall during planting. As of July 15, select fields in the central region of the state had received no rainfall since planting.

Drought conditions coupled with extreme temperatures during the month of June made establishing the crop an extreme challenge. Producers with irrigation capabilities irrigated before and after planting in an effort to improve planting conditions and transplant survivability.

Approximately 10% of the 2011 crop was replanted due to adverse conditions and skippy stands. The areas replanted in most cases did fare better than the original

plantings. Producers in the central region of the state have been hardest hit by the dry conditions. Mr. Nelson Bordelon, of Green World Farms in Avoyelles Parish, indicated that he didn’t plant about 5% of his crop because of the drought and that he replanted some areas three times in an effort to establish a stand. Mr. Bordelon finished planting on July 7.

Mr. Ken Thornhill, of Thornhill Farms in Franklin Parish, and Mr. Larry Fontenot, of E&L Produce in Evangeline Parish, echoed the same sentiments. “Early plantings look really good and the first plantings are off to a great start and we should experience timely harvest in those areas.” Mr. Fontenot added that, “Insect pressure from beetles has been light this year, but we have seen a lot of pressure from worm pests.”

Mr. Fontenot was optimistic that harvest on early plantings would begin toward the end of August or early September. Mr. Thornhill indicated that even skippy stands may have a chance if we have good weather conditions to size the crop. “We intend to jumbo some of the later plantings and send that product to Lamb Weston for processing.”

***Despite some initial challenges, the 2011 crop is shaping up nicely, and Louisiana producers are poised to harvest and average crop this fall barring any unforeseen weather issues.***

It is estimated that Louisiana producers planted approximately 14,000 acres of sweet potato in 2011.

Beauregard remains the predominate variety planted in Louisiana with about 10% of our crop planted in Evangeline and Covington varieties.

As you look toward the harvest season, remain diligent in managing insects. Pressure from beet armyworms and loopers has increased in the last few weeks. Detailed insect management guides are available to assist you in making pest management decisions. Please contact me or your respective county agent for more information. Please visit the LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station website for a detailed listing of available publications.

[http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our\\_offices/research\\_stations/Sweetpotato](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our_offices/research_stations/Sweetpotato)

**LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station Foundation Seed Program Update**  
*Tara Smith*

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The 2011 Foundation seed crop is one of the most diverse that has been planted at the station in recent years. The LSU AgCenter breeding program is rolling out new sweet potato breeding lines that offer much promise to the industry over the next few years.

Both LA 05-111 and LA 07-146 have been incorporated into the Foundation Seed Program. These varieties were planted on a limited acreage this year and will be available in limited quantities under Material Transfer Agreements in 2012. In addition, several acres of Beauregard and Evangeline were planted at the station this year.

Approximately 40 acres of foundation seed are produced at the LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station each year. In addition to commercial varieties, the station also plants limited quantities of heirloom varieties such as Porto Rican and Heart of Gold.

Thank you for supporting the LSU AgCenter Foundation Seed Program in 2010. We look forward to working with you during the coming year.

### **Market Outlook**

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The 2010 Louisiana crop supply is exhausted. Louisiana shippers depleted their supplies over the summer. The price received for the crop held steady over summer with the current FOB price for U.S. # 1's around \$17-18. Harvest in Louisiana should begin in earnest in early September.

As is the case, the price received for the new crop will partially depend on any residual supply in other sweet potato production states. Demand for premium-quality sweet potatoes is on the rise. Per capita consumption of the crop has increased over 34% during the past ten years!

### **USDA Specialty Crop Weed Science Project Update**

*Donnie Miller*

*John B. Baker Professor for Excellence in Weed Science and Resident Research Coordinator, Northeast Research Station*

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Recent economic developments in Louisiana regarding the sweet potato processing sector have resulted in a potential increase for growth of the industry in Louisiana. With the primary production focus on tonnage in processing systems, along with differing grading requirements, opportunities exist for utilization of alternative weed management strategies than those currently implemented in primarily fresh market production systems.

Opportunities may also exist to alter production strategies such as cultivar selection (Beauregard vs. Evangeline) and plant spacing (12" vs. 16"). Such changes, in combination with altered weed management strategies, need to be identified to maximize production. In addition, the potential for reduced herbicide usage may be realized with implementation of such strategies. This may be accomplished through natural, advantageous, competitive aspects associated with growth habit of the cultivar utilized and impacts of plant spacing on shading effects/competition potential with individual weed species.

Reduced herbicide usage offers the potential for reduced production costs associated with weed management and positive benefits to the environmental profile. Researchers with the LSU AgCenter are currently addressing these issues through activities related to a

USDA Specialty Crop Project, which was funded during fall 2010. The project, which is funded through 2013, is titled "Identification of Weed Management Strategies to Maximize Profits for the Processing Sector of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Industry."

We are currently in our first year of field studies with this project. The overall goal of this project is to identify the best systems approach for management of problematic weed species in the sweet potato processing sector utilizing current commercial herbicides along with production practices including cultivar selection and plant spacing. In doing so, we hope to increase the competitiveness of sweet potato producers in Louisiana through enhanced weed management and production strategies that will ultimately contribute to the long-term economic sustainability of the Louisiana sweet potato industry.

### **Sugarcane beetle Research Update**

*Tara Smith*

The sugarcane beetle is a significant insect pest affecting sweet potatoes in Louisiana. 2010 was a particularly bad year for damage incurred from this pest. Several producers across the state reported damage on over 50% of their crop. In the most severe cases, it was estimated that losses were in excess of \$500,000 due to reduced pack outs.

We have several ongoing research and demonstration trials across the state, evaluating new management

options for this insect. We are working with four producers, three in north La. and one in the southern production area to evaluate labeled insecticides at different timings in large strip trial tests. We are destructive-sampling in the non-treated plots in these tests beginning 40 days after planting in an effort to pinpoint when the damage is occurring.

We will also evaluate samples from all treatments at harvest. In addition, we have three research station trials devoted to researching management options for the sugarcane beetle.

We also are sampling populations in different locations with black lights and sticky traps.

I would like to thank all cooperating producers who are working with us in on-farm trials. Updates on this research will be provided at winter production meetings.

### **Industry News**

#### **Northeast La. Sweet Potato Association to Host Annual Louisiana Sweet Potato Association Meeting January 10-11, 2012**

The annual meeting of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Association will be held January 11, 2012, in Oak Grove, La. The board meetings will be held the afternoon of the 10th, followed by the board supper that evening. All meetings will take place at the Lingo Center. More information regarding local accommodations and meetings times will be available in the next issue of this newsletter.

### **Industry News**

#### **On-Farm Sweet Potato Field Day: August 24, 2011 Oak Grove, LA**

The LSU AgCenter is hosting an on-farm sweet potato field day on August 24, 2011. The program will commence at the West Carroll extension office at 7:30 a.m., and participants will then caravan to the field site. Research and extension updates on several topics will be provided including: 1) USDA: Specialty Crop Research Initiative production research, 2) Update on the sweet potato breeding program (highlighting LA 07-146), 3) Sugarcane beetle research update 4) weed research update, 5) virus vector research update and 6) verification program and economic update. The program will conclude at the extension office where we will have a short program and enjoy a sponsored lunch. Please make plans to attend as your schedules allow.

Please contact Tara Smith ([tsmith@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:tsmith@agcenter.lsu.edu)) 318-435-2155 or Myrl Sistrunk ([msistrunk@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:msistrunk@agcenter.lsu.edu)) if you have any questions regarding this event.

#### **LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Blog... Have you subscribed???**

More and more people are using social networking tools to communicate not only in their personal lives but also for business purposes. Many of you reading this have smart phones and regularly send and receive text messages and

check email on a regular basis. Others are not as tech savvy but nonetheless can see the value in rapid information delivery.

Last year we started a Sweet Potato Blog. A blog is nothing more than a web-based communication tool where information is posted and others can communicate and network about the information. If you have not already done so, please subscribe to this blog. You can visit the following web address and sign up for email notification so that you will know when a new blog has been posted. <http://louisianasweetpotatoes.wordpress.com>

We will continue to use other media such as newsletters and mailings to get timely information to you. This is another tool in the toolbox that aims to increase and facilitate communication among those interested in the Louisiana Sweet Potato Industry.

### **California to host National Sweet Potato Convention in Dana Point, Calif., at the St. Regis Resort.**



The California Sweet Potato Association will host the 50th Annual United States Sweet Potato Convention on January 22–24, 2012. The meeting will be held in Dana Point, California at the St. Regis Resort. *Make your hotel reservations now by calling: 888-627-7219.* Please visit the United States Sweet Potato Council website

[www.sweetpotatousa.org](http://www.sweetpotatousa.org) or the California Sweet Potato Council website <http://www.cayam.com/2012/hotel.html> to view/download the invitation letter and registration form.

### **Featured Recipe**

#### **Easy Pot Roast**

You can throw this roast in a low-temperature oven early in the afternoon, then go run errands and have dinner waiting when you get home! These few ingredients create a sensational gravy that's great over brown rice or barley.

#### *Ingredients:*

- 1 (4-pound) beef sirloin tip roast, trimmed of fat
- 6 cloves garlic, sliced, or 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste (optional)
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 1 (10 3/4-ounce) can reduced-fat cream of mushroom soup
- 1 (16-ounce) package baby carrots
- 2 cups peeled, cubed sweet potatoes (yams)
- 2 cups peeled, cubed red potatoes

#### *Instructions:*

1. Preheat the oven to 300 degrees. Cut slits in the roast and stuff pieces of garlic throughout the beef. Season the beef with salt and pepper (if using).
2. Spread the sliced onion over the roast and pour the soup over the onions. Cover and bake for 4 hours.
3. Add the carrots and potatoes and continue cooking for another hour or until the beef is tender.

#### *Nutrition:*

Per serving: Calories 249, Calories from Fat 72, Total Fat 8g, Saturated Fat 2g, Cholesterol 57mg, Sodium 254mg, Carbs 14g, Dietary Fiber 2g, Sugars 4g, Protein 29g

#### *Credits:*

Created by Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission spokesperson, Holly Clegg.

[www.sweetpotato.org](http://www.sweetpotato.org)

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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 Tara Smith**

318-435-2155  
tsmith@agctr.lsu.edu  
318-557-9501 (cell)

### **Sweet Potato County Agents**

Morehouse Parish  
West Carroll Parish  
**Myrl Sistrunk**  
318-428-3571  
msistrunk@agctr.lsu.edu

Evangeline Parish  
Acadia Parish  
**Vince Deshotel**  
337-948-0561  
vdeshotel@agctr.lsu.edu

Avoyelles Parish  
St. Landry Parish  
**Rob Ferguson**  
318-964-2249  
referguson@agcenter.lsu.edu

Franklin Parish  
**Carol Pinnell-Alison**  
318-435-7551  
CPinnell-alison@agctr.lsu.edu