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Sweet Potato Crop Update

Tara Smith, Associate Professor and Sweet Potato Specialist, LSU AgCenter

Despite excessive heat and drought conditions encountered during the planting and growing seasons, Louisiana sweet potato producers harvested an average crop this year. Approximately 14,000 acres of sweet potatoes were planted in Louisiana in 2011, and harvesting began in earnest in mid-September. As of Dec. 1, only a few acres remained unharvested statewide.

Planting conditions were ideal during the month of May, but some plantings did suffer from dry conditions and excessive heat in early June. Marginal soil moisture and high soil temperatures negatively affected some plantings. In addition, extreme heat and dry conditions plagued many of our production areas throughout the growing season. Producers with irrigation capabilities were largely able to stay on track, but less-than-average yields have been reported in some of the affected areas.

Weather conditions during the harvest season have been favorable. A portion of our acreage received 10-12 inches of rain in conjunction with Tropical Storm Lee, but the rain actually proved to be a beneficial event in most areas

due to extreme drought conditions encountered prior to the storm. Temperatures were mild, and field conditions rapidly improved following the rainfall, which resulted in minimal issues related to rot or breakdown of roots. The majority of yields reported thus far have been average to slightly above average.

In-season insect pressure was light overall during 2011. In addition, there were fewer reports of sugarcane beetle damage this year. Many producers adjusted their insect control programs following the 2010 season, when several producers suffered excessive loss from this insect. LSU AgCenter research and extension personnel had several on-farm and research station trials in place for the sugarcane beetle this year – in an effort to improve management of the pest in sweet potatoes. Updates on sugarcane beetle management options and other issues affecting the crop will be presented at winter production meetings.

Foundation Seed Update

Tara Smith

The LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station produced approximately 40 acres of foundation seed in 2011. Several varieties will be available for purchase this year, including Beauregard

and Evangeline. In addition, two new varieties slated for release this year, 07-146 and 05-111, will be made available. A license will be required to grow both of these varieties. *(Please contact the station for specifics.)* Specific information regarding the varieties can be found in the variety update of this issue.

Letters regarding foundation seed were mailed to producers and county agents in early December. Seed allocation will proceed similar to last year. Once all of the orders have been received (Deadline: Jan. 30, 2012), available seed will be allocated, and producers will be notified about their orders. Orders received after Jan. 30, 2012, will be handled on a first-come, first-served basis.

If you have any questions concerning the foundation seed program, please call Tara Smith at the Sweet Potato Research Station (318-435-2155).

Variety Update ***Dr. Don Labonte***

'07-146' (patent pending) is a new deep orange flesh, red/purple skinned sweet potato. The red color is attractive but untested in the fresh market.

Sugar content is similar to Evangeline, but it has a more firm texture when baked. Production characteristics in plant beds are similar to Beauregard. Its most salient attribute is yield; it consistently yields 10 percent higher than Beauregard – an obvious strength. Shape is not as consistent as '05-111,' however. Some striations

(grooves) and flat sides are found due to heavy storage root set. Shape is slightly improved over Beauregard, but root to root variability does exist. Disease characteristics are similar to Beauregard, except for higher levels of resistance to root-knot nematodes.

No name yet for '07-146'! We have discovered we cannot trademark a name if we include it on the patent application, so the name will come later. Also, it has not been released as a variety by the LSU AgCenter, but we are making seed available for the 2012 season. '07-146' is available for nonexclusive fresh market license only to Louisiana growers. Please contact the LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station or your parish extension office for additional information.

'05-111' (patent pending) is a new orange flesh, light rose skinned sweet potato. This variety is a "twin" to 'Beauregard' in many ways.

Skin and flesh color are similar to 'Beauregard,' and the sugar profiles are identical to 'Beauregard,' so flavor is unchanged. Production characteristics in plant beds and the field (days to harvest) are again similar to 'Beauregard.' Same for disease resistance – just like 'Beauregard.'

So what makes '05-111' different? Well, yield is not really any different from Beauregard; in fact, you might see fewer jumbos, but the grade out is improved due to quality. It is more uniform in

quality and shape, so what we see is an improvement in "rank." '05-111' more often than not will edge out 'Beauregard' in yield of U.S. No. 1s – although not like we see with '07-146,' but it is there.

Again, this one also has no name yet because of the discovery that we cannot trademark a name if we include it on the patent application. Like '07-146,' this one also has not been officially released as a variety by the LSU AgCenter, but we are making seed available for the 2012 season.

There are some changes in the way '05-111' is being handled. Growers will need to purchase a license (\$500) and report acreage and production locations. Louisiana growers will have a 250 acre waiver of any acreage charges before a \$15 per acre fee is assessed. Out-of-state growers will have higher license fees and pay for all acres. Our intent is to minimize in-state costs of growing '05-111.'

All traditional outlets for canners and jumbos remain in place. Again, you can contact the LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station for licensing information concerning our varieties.

Market Outlook ***Tara Smith***

Louisiana producers harvested a good sweet potato crop in 2011. The crop is on the drier side this year, and this should translate into good storability and excellent shelf life.

Movement of the crop increased over the past

several weeks to satisfy the Thanksgiving demand. By mid-October, most producers were shipping at 100 percent of their potential. There is a significant pressure on price presently, due to the adequate supply in all sweet potato producing states. Sweet potatoes are marketed year-round, and shippers realize the importance of satisfying the retail and consumer markets to meet the 12-month demand for premium product.

Louisiana producers are capitalizing on new marketing opportunities. The crop is moving into several venues and is marketed fresh, frozen, canned and as a myriad of other value-added products.

**Sweet Potato Producers
Learn Latest at LSU
AgCenter On-farm Field Day**
*Mary Ann Van Osdell, LSU
AgCenter Communications
News Release Distributed
08/29/11*

OAK GROVE, La. – Researchers from the LSU AgCenter's [Sweet Potato Research Station](#) showed growers how to optimize production at a field day on the Lee Jones and Sons Farm on Aug. 24.

Chris Clark, LSU AgCenter plant pathologist, said a sweet potato variety similar to Evangeline but with even better tolerance to field flooding is slated for release this fall. Other characteristics of the new variety are red skin and deep orange flesh, less bent roots than the Beauregard variety, high sugar content, excellent plant production and resistance to disease. Clark said the LSU AgCenter screens all breeding

lines for various diseases. "Around the world, 30 viruses occur in sweet potatoes," Clark said, explaining that researchers look at how, where and when viruses spread in the field.

Arthur Villordon, LSU AgCenter professor, said this has been a challenging year to grow any crop but that sweet potatoes are fairly resistant to drought because they are able to use moisture in the deep part of the soil.

"We are looking for good yields for those who got rainfall and irrigation at the right time and place," he said. He discussed deploying sensors in growers' fields to collect soil moisture data and rainfall. "This year, soil moisture is important," Villordon said. "If you don't have soil moisture, they're not going to grow."

Ted McDermott, sweet potato manager for R.D. Offutt Co., said he recommends the moisture probe Villordon discussed. "It is a helpful tool to apply the science of what's going on in the crop. "The LSU AgCenter is our guide," McDermott said.

Rick Story, LSU AgCenter entomologist, said there have been advancements in pesticides, with a lot more choices available. Story said he and Tara Smith, extension sweet potato specialist, put out chemical tests in grower fields every year, pre-plant and layby applications, to compare yield and quality.

Smith said the LSU AgCenter is working with four producers to evaluate labeled insecticides at different timings in large strip tests to help

manage the sugarcane beetle. She said the AgCenter also is sampling sugarcane beetle populations with black lights and sticky traps. "I don't see this beetle as a sporadic pest any longer," Smith said.

Donnie Miller, LSU AgCenter weed specialist, said researchers are looking to broaden the options in weed management. "We don't have a whole big arsenal we can look at," he said. He said most of his calls are about alligator weed and that Sept. 15 through Oct. 15 is the optimum time to initiate treatment with glyphosate.

Attending the field day were 85 producers, processors and agrichemical company representatives from as far as North Carolina and Oklahoma.

Industry News

Louisiana Sweet Potato Association Annual Meeting To Be Held Jan. 10-11, 2012

The annual meeting of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Association will be held, Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2012, in Oak Grove, La.

The meeting will take place at the Thomas Jason Lingo Center (West Carroll Extension Office) on Louisiana Highway 17 in Oak Grove. The educational program will begin at 8 a.m. and will be followed by a sponsored lunch.

In addition, board meetings of the association and the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission will be held Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2012, and will begin at 1 pm.

Please plan to attend these meetings as your schedules permit. Research and industry updates will be provided, and this is a great opportunity to interact with others in the industry.

Please contact Tara Smith or Myrl Sistrunk with any questions or concerns regarding the 2012 state meeting.

Scholar® SC Fungicide Approved for Use in European Markets

Scholar® SC, a reduced risk fungicide, can now be used on sweet potatoes destined for Europe and the United Kingdom. This product has been labeled for use on sweet potatoes for several years, but the maximum residue level (MRL) initially was set too low, and the product could not be used for markets governed by the European Union.

Scholar® SC is an alternative fungicide for the control of post-harvest diseases caused by *Rhizopus stolonifer* (Rhizopus soft rot).

Please consult the label for application methods and use rates. Dr. Chris Clark, Professor, Department of Plant Pathology and Crop Physiology, LSU AgCenter, has conducted numerous trials, evaluating the efficacy of Scholar for controlling Rhizopus soft rot.

California To Host National Sweet Potato Convention at St. Regis Resort in Dana Point, Calif.

The California Sweet Potato Council will host the 50th

Annual U.S. Sweet Potato Convention Jan. 22–24, 2012.

The meeting will be held in Dana Point, Calif., at the St. Regis Resort. *Make your hotel reservations now by calling 949-234-3200.*

Please visit the U.S. Sweet Potato Council website at www.sweetpotatousa.org or the California sweet potato council website at www.cayam.com to view/download the invitation letter and registration form.

Featured Recipe

Sweet Potato Dippers

Ingredients:

Dippers:
1-1/4 pounds sweet potatoes (about 2 medium), peeled
1 tablespoon olive oil
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper

Dip:
3 ounces fat-free cream cheese
3 tablespoons reduced-fat sour cream
2 teaspoons finely chopped green onion
2 teaspoons seeded jalapeno pepper, finely chopped

Instructions:

Cut potatoes into 1/8-inch slices. Place in a large bowl. Drizzle with oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat.

Arrange in a single layer in two ungreased 15-inch-by-10-inch-by-1-inch baking pans. Bake at 375 degrees for 25-30 minutes or until golden brown, turning once.

In a small bowl, beat dip ingredients. Serve with potatoes. Garnish with additional onion, if desired. Yield: 4 servings.

Variations:

Garnish, optional: Additional finely chopped green onions

Nutrition:

Servings Per Recipe: 4

1 cup dippers with 2 tablespoons dip equals 155 calories, 5 grams fat (1 gram saturated fat), 5 milligrams cholesterol, 280 milligrams sodium, 23 grams carbohydrate, 3 grams fiber, 5 grams protein. Diabetic exchanges: 1-1/2 starch, 1 fat.

Credits:

Recipe courtesy of Taste of Home
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www.sweetpotato.org

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.

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