Sweet Potato Crop Update;  
Tara Smith, Associate Professor and Coordinator, LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station

The 2013 Louisiana sweet potato crop was met with challenges early on, which delayed planting and contributed to reduced acreage for 2012.

Due to steady rains and a cooler-than-normal spring, plant beds were delayed in many cases. Numerous producers dealt with erratic plant growth. Disease issues and breakdown of seed roots also were more prevalent this year.

As a result, planting was delayed across the state, compared to the last two years. The majority of the crop was planted in late May through the month of June. Approximately 7,500 acres were planted to sweet potatoes in Louisiana in 2013 – a 25 percent reduction from 2012 acreage.

Most of the crop was planted into good soil conditions and received adequate rainfall during the planting season and early growing season. But most of it will need additional moisture to finish sizing. Producers with irrigation capabilities are irrigating to stay on schedule.

As of Aug. 15, only a few producers in the southern part of the state had initiated harvest. Harvest should begin in earnest about Sept. 10.

As many of you know, I recently accepted the position as the regional director for the LSU AgCenter’s Northeast Region. In that position, I will continue coordination of our Sweet Potato Research Station and the foundation seed program, as well as a small research and extension appointment in sweet potatoes.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Louisiana sweet potato industry. I have truly enjoyed my time as Louisiana sweet potato specialist. The industry has endured many successes and hardships during the past seven years. I appreciate the dedication and commitment of our growers and industry partners. I am excited that I will still be working with you and I am confident that Mavis Finger will do an exceptional job for you as our new sweet potato specialist.
Mavis Finger Recently Hired as LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Specialist, Regional Horticulture Specialist

Mavis Finger, a native of south Louisiana, began her new appointment as the sweet potato extension specialist and regional horticulture extension specialist with the LSU AgCenter Aug. 1, 2013.

Her interest in agriculture began with early experiences farming vegetables with her father. “As soon as I could walk, I was holding the sack for my dad as he picked sweet corn,” Finger said. During high school, she helped scout sugarcane with her father. “Scouting was both a trying and rewarding experience,” she said. “It helped me to realize I wanted to continue my education in agriculture.”

Finger received her bachelor of science degree in horticultural sciences from LSU in 2010. While studying at LSU, she worked in a retail ornamental nursery. After graduating from LSU, Finger moved to Tifton, Ga., to work on her master of science degree in plant pathology at the University of Georgia. While there, she studied fungicide resistance in the gummy stem blight pathogen of watermelon. After completing her master’s degree work in August, she moved to Chase, La., to serve in her current position.

Finger says she is looking forward to forging new relationships with growers and industry members. “Our growers bring a tremendous wealth of knowledge to the table, and I am eager to learn all that I can about this cropping system and this industry.”

Finger joins a team of research and extension professionals at the LSU AgCenter who work to support the Louisiana Sweet Potato Industry. “Our growers have had a difficult past few years, but there is a team of exceptional individuals working to address many of the issues they face and to help our growers become more efficient and increase production. It is a true privilege to join that team.”

Finger is housed at the Sweet Potato Research Station in Chase and can be reached at mfinger@agcenter.lsu.edu or 985-226-1139.

LDAF Specialty Crop Program Funds Weed Science Research for Sweet Potatoes

Dr. Donnie Miller, John B. Baker Professor of Weed Science and Coordinator of Macon Ridge and Northeast Research Stations

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry’s Specialty Crop Grant Program recently provided nearly $70,000 for a two-year research project focused on sweet potatoes. Headed by LSU AgCenter scientists Dr. Donnie Miller and Dr. Tara Smith, the project aims to document the effects of reduced rates of hormonal herbicides 2,4-D and dicamba in an off-target event on the growth and yield of commonly grown sweet potato varieties in Louisiana.

Production costs associated with a sweet potato crop far exceed those of producing many other agronomic row crops. As a result, producers try to optimize every aspect of crop production – from fertility to pest management and irrigation – to maximize yield and profit margins.

Off-target movement or drift of herbicides, to which a sweet potato crop is highly sensitive, can lead to significant effects on growth and yield and ultimately result in serious economic losses. Current biotechnological advances in agronomic row crops have led to the development of varieties that tolerate herbicides to which the plants previously were susceptible.

The proposed research aims to assess the effects of the herbicides 2,4-D and dicamba, applied at reduced rates that are often encountered in off-target or drift events on the growth and yield of sweet potato varieties commonly grown in the state. In addition, susceptibility, as determined by effects and the plant growth stage at time of exposure, will be assessed.

Such information will be critical to the sweet potato industry to possibly lead to more restrictive label application requirements in close proximity to the crop. In addition, this research will provide critical information to producers that may be used in determining compensation amounts should off-target movement events occur to a sweet potato crop.
research results also will help consultants, producers, agricultural industry personnel, and state officials identify injury symptoms and determine yield effects based on the amount of visual injury and growth issues observed following off-target events.

**Market Outlook**
*Tara Smith, Associate Professor and Sweet Potato Specialist, LSU AgCenter*

The Louisiana sweet potato harvest will be in full swing by mid-September, and the crop is shaping up nicely. Barring any unforeseen weather events this fall, the crop is expected to return average to above-average yields.

Acreage is down across sweet potato producing states, including Louisiana, Mississippi and North Carolina. Producers are optimistic that the reduced acreage will result in a higher prices for the 2013 crop.

**Industry News**

**Louisiana Hosting National Sweet Potato Council Convention**

*Make your reservations and remember to register...* The National Sweet Potato Convention is just around the corner.

The theme for this year’s convention is *"Laissez Les Bon Temps Rouler (Let the Good Times Roll),"* and we plan to do just that.

The meeting will be held in New Orleans at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in the historic French Quarter. Just like our famous cuisine, Louisiana has a rich and colorful cultural history that is firmly “rooted” in New Orleans. Located in the heart of the French Quarter on world-famous Bourbon Street, the Royal Sonesta Hotel New Orleans displays a timeless elegance and refinement reminiscent of its European counterparts. The hotel is distinctively European and unmistakably New Orleans.

We are gearing up for an entertaining and informative meeting, and we hope all of you will be able to join us. We are developing a great educational program that will appeal to all those associated with the industry. Horticultural research updates, policy and labor information, a presentation by a producer, a feature of a Louisiana sweet potato operation and a panel presentation with speakers from the sweet potato processing industry are a few topics on the agenda.

A block of rooms has been reserved at the *Royal Sonesta Hotel New Orleans* (1-800-SONESTA or 504-586-0300). Please ask for group code: *“United States Sweet Potato Council.”* Make your reservations by Dec. 20, 2013, to ensure you are able to reserve a room in our block for $159 per night.

You can find registration information on the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission website at [www.sweetpotato.org](http://www.sweetpotato.org). Or if you have any questions concerning the 2014 convention, contact Rene Simon ([rsimon@ldaf.state.la.us](mailto:rsimon@ldaf.state.la.us)) or Tara Smith ([tsmith@agctr.lsu.edu](mailto:tsmith@agctr.lsu.edu)).

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**Bruce Garner Appointed County Agent in West Carroll Parish**

Bruce Garner was appointed as an LSU AgCenter county agent in West Carroll Parish on May 1, 2013.

Prior to assuming those responsibilities, Garner was working as the broadband coordinator for the Connect My Louisiana Project in the northeast region of the state and also as an assistant county agent in Morehouse Parish.

Garner said he looks forward to meeting and working with everyone in the West Carroll area. Please feel free to contact him with any of your crop needs. He can be reached at 337-581-7024 or bgarner@agcenter.lsu.edu.
Featured Recipe: Ham and Sweet Potato Pot Pie With Pecan Crust

The perfect comfort meal that will please the family with every bite.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup chopped onion
- 2 cups cubed sweet potatoes or 2 (15-ounce) cans sweet potatoes, drained and cubed
- 2 cups canned chicken broth, divided
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup skim milk
- 2 cups cubed cooked ham
- 9-inch refrigerated pie crust
- 1/2 cup finely chopped pecans

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large pot coated with nonstick cooking spray, sauté the onion over medium-high heat for 5 minutes. Add fresh* sweet potatoes and 2/3 cup chicken broth. Bring mixture to a boil and simmer over medium heat for 10 to 15 minutes or until sweet potatoes are tender. (If using canned yams, add them and 2/3 cup chicken broth to sautéed onions; heat thoroughly.) Add flour, while stirring, and gradually add milk, stirring until well combined. Add ham, bring to a boil and then transfer mixture to a 9x9-inch baking dish coated with nonstick cooking spray. If mixture is too thick, add more broth or milk. Unfold crust and sprinkle pecans on one side; Then fold and roll with rolling pin, pressing pecans into crust. Spread pecan crust on top of mixture and bake for 30 minutes or until crust is brown.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

*Canned sweet potatoes are already cooked.

Credit:
Created by Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission spokesperson Holly Clegg

LSU AgCenter Extension Service 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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