



CORN • COTTON • GRAIN SORGHUM • SOYBEANS • WHEAT

## ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

### Gearing up for harvest

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## Timing is important when using harvest aids in soybeans

BY TODD SPIVEY, JOSH COPES, SEBE BROWN, DANIEL STEPHENSON AND DONNIE MILLER

We have received numerous calls in the past several weeks about soybean harvest aids. These products have become popular in Louisiana. Timely applications can improve seed quality and harvest efficiency while potentially resulting in a soybean harvest 10 to 14 days sooner than in non-treated beans. But applying a harvest aid too early can lower yields.

### Timing

The goal of using harvest aids is to promote an earlier, more efficient harvest. To achieve both, harvest aids must be applied in a timely manner. Once soybean seeds have separated from the white membrane inside pods, they have reached physiological maturity and will no longer increase in size nor dry weight. At this stage, seeds are at about 50 percent moisture content and will begin to dry. Using a harvest aid prior to the majority of seeds reaching physiological maturity will result in a loss in yield.

**Table 1** provides application timing requirements for harvest aids labeled for use in soybeans. [LSU AgCenter research](#) conducted by Jim Griffin and Joey Boudreaux established that harvest aids can be applied to soybeans without a yield penalty at the R6.5 growth stage (**Figure 1**), when seeds have separated from the pod membrane.



**Figure 1.** R6.5 soybean seeds. LSU AGCENTER PHOTO BY JOSH COPES

Plant appearance at the R6.5 stage will vary by variety, so pay close attention to the pods. The aforementioned research indicated that maturity group IV soybean yields were reduced by 15.4 percent when harvest aids were applied before R6.5 (60 percent moisture). For maturity group V and VI, however, harvest aid applications prior to either R6.5 or 40 percent seed moisture resulted in yield losses of 15.6 percent and 4 percent, respectively.

**Figures 1, 2 and 3** show photos of soybean seeds and pods to help with desiccation timing.

## When is it safe to apply a harvest aid?

Source: Jim Griffin and Joey Boudreaux, LSU AgCenter

- 1.** Begin to scout fields for harvest aid timing when leaves begin to yellow.
- 2.** Collect pods from the top four nodes of the plant at multiple random locations in a field.
- 3.** Open pods — they should shell easily — and look for separation from the membrane.
- 4.** If seeds have separated from the membrane in all pods collected, this means they've reached their maximum dry weight. Harvest aids can be applied now without a yield penalty.

**Table 1.** Proper application timings based on labels of harvest aid products for soybeans.

<b>GRAMOXONE SL</b>	
Indeterminate varieties	65% of pods have reached a mature brown color or seed moisture is less than 30%
Determinate varieties	Plants are mature, beans are fully developed, 50% of leaves have dropped and remaining leaves are yellowing
<b>DEFOL 5 (SODIUM CHLORATE)</b>	
All soybean varieties	Make application seven to 10 days prior to anticipated harvest
<b>SHARPEN</b>	
	Spray over the top of soybeans that have reached physiological maturity (all pods and seeds have no more mature color)
Indeterminate varieties	Greater than 65% brown pods and greater than 70% leaf drop, or when seed is 30% moisture or less
Determinate varieties	Beans are fully developed, more than 50% leaf drop and leaves are yellowing
<b>AIM</b>	
All soybean varieties	Do not apply within three days of harvest

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BY JOSH  
COPEs



**Figure 2.** Soybean pods, with the youngest at left and oldest at right. The middle pod is at the R6.5 growth stage.



**Figure 3.** Opened soybean pods, with the youngest at left and oldest at right. The middle pod is at the R6.5 growth stage. Notice how the older pods have more clearly defined seed margins than the younger pods.

## Products

There are several harvest aid options. The most common is paraquat mixed with a nonionic surfactant or crop oil concentrate. Producers may consider including carfentrazone (Aim) or saflufenacil (Sharpen) with paraquat to improve desiccation of vines. A tank mix of paraquat with sodium chlorate may be warranted to improve desiccation of grassy weeds prior to harvest.

We have received questions about using sodium chlorate to help reduce drift of aerial paraquat applications. The LSU AgCenter has no data associated with this claim and only recommends using these products in combinations for improving desiccation of grassy weeds.

Environmental conditions should be considered when choosing a desiccant. The Gramoxone SL label states it is rain-fast in 15 to 30 minutes after application. The Defol 5 (sodium chlorate) label says not to apply if rainfall is anticipated within 24 hours. This label also notes defoliation will be best on sunny, hot, humid days. The longer it remains on the plant, the better it will perform.

It is imperative to consider the pre-harvest interval (PHI) required with each product. When using multiple products, adhere to the longest PHI.

Labeled rates and comments from the “2017 Louisiana Suggested Weed Management Guide” are below in **Table 2**. [The full guide is available online](#). Always consult product labels prior to application.

**Table 2.** Preharvest desiccants.

ACTIVE INGREDIENT AND RATE	FORMULATED PRODUCT AND RATE	WEEDS CONTROLLED	REMARKS AND PRECAUTIONS
carfentrazone @ 0.023 lb/A	Aim 2EC @ 1.5 oz/A Add 1% v/v crop oil concentrate	Better on morningglories than pigweed, sicklepod, etc.	Apply after crop has matured and grain has begun to dry down. More effective on annual vines. Do not apply within 3 days of harvest. Apply in 10 gal. by ground, 5 gal. by air.
saflufenacil @ 0.022 - 0.045 lb/A	Sharpen @ 1 - 2 oz/A Add 1% MSO + 8.5 lb/100 gal AMS	Morningglories and other broadleaf weeds	Apply once soybean has reached physiological maturity (all pods and seeds have no green color). Indeterminate varieties: 65% brown pods, more than 70% leaf drop, 30% or less seed moisture. Determinate varieties: more than 50% leaf drop and remaining leaves are yellowing. Preharvest interval is 3 days.
paraquat @ 0.126 - 0.25 lb/A	paraquat (2 lb/gal formulation) @ 8 - 16 oz/A; paraquat (3 lb/gal formulation) @ 5.4-10.7 oz/A Add 0.25% v/v nonionic surfactant	Desiccation of weeds and soybeans only	Indeterminate varieties: 65% of pods are mature or moisture content is 30% or less. Determinate varieties: 50% leaf drop and remaining leaves are yellow. Some drought stressed weeds will not be desiccated. Do not graze or harvest for hay. Apply in 20 gal. by ground or 5 gal. by air. Preharvest interval is 15 days. Immature soybeans will be injured.
sodium chlorate @ 6 lb/A	6 lb/gal formulation @ 1 gal/A 5 lb/gal formulation @ 1.2 gal/A 3 lb/gal formulation @ 2 gal/A	Desiccation only. Level of weed control is affected by environmental conditions.	Apply 7-10 days before harvest. Apply in 20 gal. by ground, 5 gal. by air. Check label for environmental conditions most favorable for desiccation. Apply under high temperatures and humidity.

## Redbanded stinkbug considerations

Producers should continue monitoring redbanded stink bug (RBSB) levels and should not rule out including an insecticide in a harvest aid application. LSU AgCenter entomologists recommend controlling threshold populations (four RBSB in 25 sweeps) until the soybeans are out of the field.

This means that many producers could, and should, include an insecticide to control RBSB with their harvest aid applications. (Sodium chlorate cannot be tank-mixed with any insecticide.) It is important to keep in mind, however, the restrictions associated with many products at this point in the season. These restrictions may include total active ingredient restrictions and PHIs. In Louisiana, applications of acephate, a common recommendation for RBSB control, cannot exceed 2 pounds of active ingredient per acre per year. Other insecticides have increased PHIs, including the pre-mix product Endigo, which has a PHI of 30 days.

Be sure to read all label materials before using any product. If label restrictions prevent including an insecticide in the harvest aid application, do not delay harvesting soybeans. The seeds need to be removed from the field as quickly as the label allows. §



A redbanded stinkbug. LSU AGCENTER PHOTO BY BRUCE SCHULTZ

**2015 Cotton Harvest Aid Guidelines for Louisiana**

**Introduction**  
One of the last, but most important, steps in producing a cotton crop is harvest preparation. Successful harvest preparation includes scheduling for defoliation and harvest operations, removal of foliage and facilitating boll opening. Successful defoliation has many benefits, including increased picker efficiency; elimination of trash in harvested seed cotton; faster drying of dew, which increases picking hours per day; straightening of lodged plants; and reduction of boll rot.

The activity of harvest aids is highly dependent on a number of factors such as environmental conditions, soil moisture, nitrogen levels, foliar pathogens and secondary plant growth. Moreover, cotton defoliation is a balancing act between leaf injury that stimulates leaf drop but does not desiccate and stick leaves to the plant. No one harvest aid tank mix will work in all situations. A good understanding of the influence of defoliation timing and the relative attributes of available harvest aids can help in deciding when to terminate a crop and which harvest aids to use.

**Defoliation Timing**  
There is always a balancing act between yield and fiber quality when defoliating cotton, but close attention to individual fields can help maintain quality while preserving yield. There are several accepted methods for timing of defoliation, and all methods have strengths and weaknesses. The following is a refresher of some of the more common defoliation timing techniques.

**Percentage of Open Bolls**  
The most widely used method is based on a determination of the total percentage of bolls in a field that have opened, with 60 percent of bolls open being the most commonly recommended point for defoliant application. In many situations, unopened bolls are mature enough to resist negative effects and will open before harvest. This method, however, has limitations. Research in Louisiana has shown that depending on fruit distribution on the plant, maximum yield can be obtained when defoliation occurs before 60 percent open bolls. In addition, in cases where a large fruiting "gap" (no bolls present at fruiting sites) occurs and a large percentage of bolls are less mature and set in the uppermost region of the plant, optimum defoliation timing may occur later than 70 percent open. Research evaluating optimum defoliation timing in Louisiana and other states has shown maximum yield can be achieved with application ranging from 42 percent to 81 percent open bolls, depending on crop maturity and fruit distribution.

**Nodes Above Cracked Boll**  
In contrast to the percentage of open bolls method, the nodes above cracked boll, or NACB, method focuses on the unopened portion of the crop. The nodes above cracked boll measurement is determined by locating the uppermost first-position boll that is cracked open with visible lint and counting the number of main-stem nodes to the uppermost, harvestable boll. By focusing on the unopened portion, NACB takes into account potential fruiting gaps. Most recommendations call for defoliation at four NACB. Low plant population and skip-row cotton, however, often are more safely defoliated at three NACB. Lower plant population usually means a later-maturing crop, with a significant portion of yield coming from outer-position bolls and bolls set on vegetative branches. Defoliating at a nodes above cracked boll greater than four usually will result in yield loss.

**Accumulated Heat Units After Cutout**  
Similar to NACB, a method developed in Arkansas recommends defoliation after accumulation of 850 heat units, or DD60s, after cutout. A DD60 is a measure of accumulated heat needed for growth and development using a 60 degrees Fahrenheit minimum. Research from Louisiana indicates that under our environmental conditions, the appropriate defoliation timing may be greater than 850 heat units (that is, 1,050 heat units) beyond a cutout of node above white flower four (four main-stem nodes above uppermost first-position white flower).

## Cotton defoliation tips

BY DAN FROMME

Cotton harvest is just around the corner, and a successful harvest aid program depends on several factors. Recommendations can be found in our "Cotton Harvest Aid Guidelines for Louisiana" publication, which is [available online](#).

Topics covered include:

- Methods to determine defoliation timing.
- Harvest scheduling.
- Defoliating late-maturing varieties.
- Spray coverage.
- Harvest aid materials and suggested combinations.
- Rotational crops restrictions. §

# Does that Sept. 1 boll have a chance?

BY DAN FROMME

At the end of August, we begin to wonder if bolls at the top of cotton plants have a chance of contributing to yield (**Figure 1**). When we see a 1-day-old boll on Sept. 1, what are the chances it will have time to mature (**Figure 2**)?

A boll requires about 850 heat units to open naturally and about 750 heat units to open with an ethephon application (**Figure 3**). Below are the number of heat units that were accumulated from Sept. 1 to Oct. 31 for the past nine years at the Dean Lee Research and Extension Center in Alexandria (**Table 1**). §



In Louisiana, the effective bloom period ends in late August or early September, which coincides with bolls that do not have enough time to mature as harvestable bolls. **Figure 1** is at left. **Figure 2**, right, shows a 1-day-old boll. LSU AGCENTER PHOTOS BY DAN FROMME



**Figure 3.** Cotton boll. LSU AGCENTER PHOTO BY DAN FROMME

**Table 1.** Accumulated heat units from Sept. 1 to Oct. 31 at the Dean Lee Research and Extension Center in Alexandria, Louisiana (2008 to 2016).

YEAR	DATE OF 750 ACCUMULATED HEAT UNITS	DATE OF 850 ACCUMULATED HEAT UNITS
2016	Oct. 10	Oct. 17
2015	Oct. 15	Oct. 25
2014	Oct. 17	Nov. 6
2013	Oct. 13	Oct. 29
2012	Oct. 25	*
2011	Nov. 16	*
2010	Oct. 18	Oct. 26
2009	Oct. 16	*
2008	Nov. 6	*

\* 850 accumulated heat units were not reached in November.

# Rally comes to halt, but some rebound possible

BY KURT GUIDRY

The markets for several commodities rallied in June and July as positive U.S. Department of Agriculture reports and weather concerns in parts of the Midwest and High Plains helped push prices higher. However, this rally came to an abrupt halt and prices generally have been trending downward since the middle to end of July. **Table 1** provides new crop futures prices for the past five months. As shown, current prices are at significant discounts to those seen in previous months. This is likely a result of the market becoming more comfortable with the potential size of the 2017 crops and removing some risk premium built into the market.

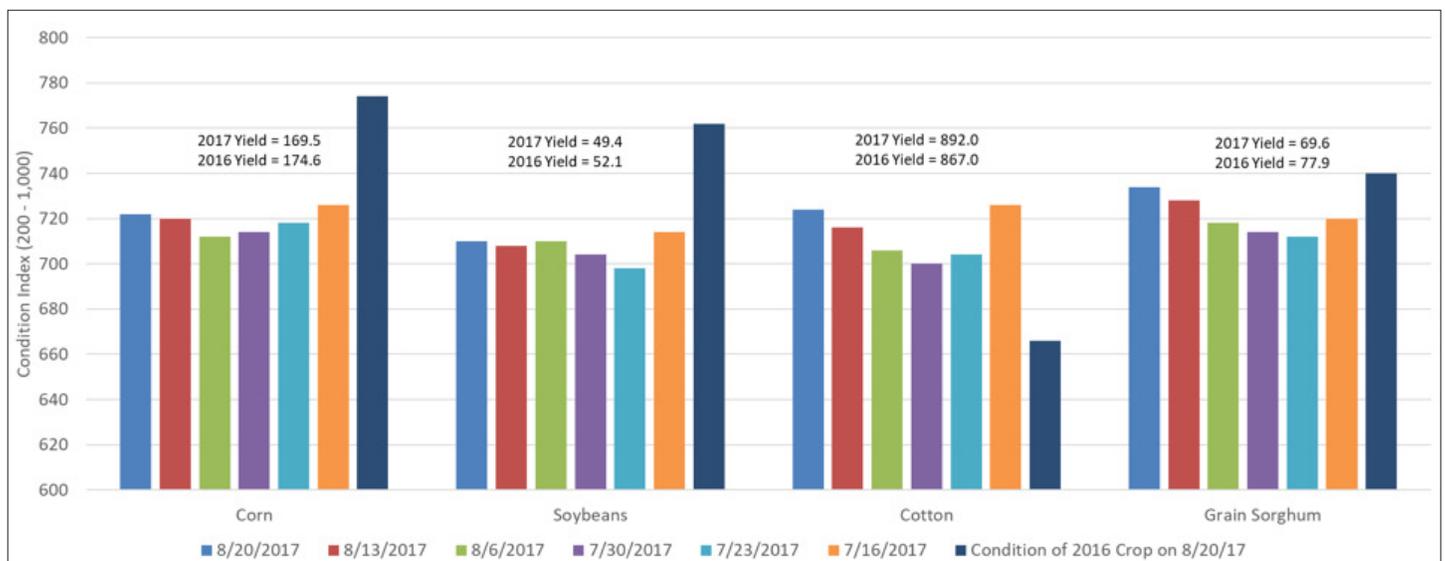
Basis levels in the state have improved slightly. Some of this is expected as we move closer to harvest and some of the production uncertainty is removed. But it also may be a signal that markets are oversold, and prices have fallen below levels suggested by supply and demand dynamics.

One factor pressuring the market is the improvement in the overall condition of most crops. **Figure 1** shows the crop condition ratings index for selected crops in the past six weeks and the rating of the 2016 crop at this time last year.

**Table 1.** New crop futures prices and current basis offers as of Aug. 22, 2017.

	CONTRACT MONTH	CLOSING PRICES ON					CURRENT BASIS BIDS FOR AUG./SEPT. DELIVERY
		April 21, 2017	May 22, 2017	June 22, 2017	July 21, 2017	Aug. 22, 2017	
Corn	September 2017	\$3.71	\$3.83	\$3.71	\$3.80	\$3.46	From \$0.15 under to \$0.10 over the September contract
Grain sorghum*	December 2017	\$3.82	\$3.93	\$3.81	\$3.94	\$3.60	From \$0.31 under to \$0.40 under the December contract
Soybeans	November 2017	\$9.60	\$9.56	\$9.13	\$10.22	\$9.38	From \$0.02 under to \$0.38 under the November contract
Cotton	December 2017	\$0.7496	\$0.7301	\$0.6674	\$0.6842	\$0.6781	N/A

\* Grain sorghum is priced based on the corn futures contract price. There is no futures contract specifically for grain sorghum.



**Figure 1.** U.S. crop condition index for week ending Aug. 20, 2017.

Ratings generally have been trending higher for all crops since the end of July. This has likely reduced some of the risk premium built into the market, but it should be noted that ratings for the 2017 crop are lower — in some cases, significantly lower — than the previous year for all commodities except cotton. While the USDA has adjusted 2017 yield projections to reflect these lower ratings, market sentiment suggests the reduction in yields from 2016 to 2017 could be even larger than what current USDA projections suggest. If yields come in lower than current USDA projections, this could help support prices.

So while the market has trended lower in the past month, I still think there is some opportunity for a small rebound in prices on additional weather concerns or projections for lower yields. Crop tours being conducted throughout the Midwest indicate considerable variability in production potential from state to state and within individual states. In general, most of the tours to this point indicate soybean

production potential at average to below average. While a little more variable in crop tour reports, the general consensus seems to be corn production potential being average to slightly above average.

Though I think there is some potential for a rebound in prices for some commodities, I also think any price strengthening will be relatively limited. **Table 2** shows the latest supply and demand estimates for selected commodities. Current projections for ending stocks and stocks-to-use ratios for most commodities are at or approaching burdensome levels.

Even if we see some downward adjustments in projected yields, I don't think they will be large enough by themselves to significantly alter the overall view of total supplies and ending stocks and lead to dramatically higher prices. Improvements in the outlook for overall demand also likely would be needed to provide enough of a boost to push prices significantly higher.

**Table 2.** U.S. supply and demand projections for selected commodities, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 marketing years.

	CORN			SOYBEANS			GRAIN SORGHUM			COTTON		
	2016-2017	2017-2018	2017-2018	2016-2017	2017-2018	2017-2018	2016-2017	2017-2018	2017-2018	2016-2017	2017-2018	2017-2018
Planted acres	94.0	90.9	90.9	83.4	89.5	89.5	6.7	6.0	6.0	10.07	12.06	12.06
Projected yield	174.6	170.7	169.5	52.1	48.0	49.4	77.9	67.0	69.6	867.0	816.0	892.0
Total supply	16,940	16,675	16,573	4,528	4,695	4,777	518	409	422	20.98	22.21	23.36
Total use	14,570	14,350	14,300	4,158	4,235	4,301	465	360	370	18.17	16.90	17.55
Ending stocks	2,370	2,325	2,273	370	460	476	53	49	52	2.81	5.31	5.81
Stocks-to-use	16.27%	16.20%	15.90%	8.90%	10.86%	11.07%	11.40%	13.61%	14.05%	15.47%	31.42%	33.11%
Average farm price	\$3.35	\$3.30	\$3.30	\$9.50	\$9.40	\$9.30	\$2.75	\$2.90	\$2.90	\$0.68	\$0.68	\$0.61

**Table 3** shows current export shipments and total export potential (shipments plus outstanding sales). As shown, export demand for most commodities has been strong. In fact, for commodities like soybeans, the current level of shipments plus outstanding sales exceeds USDA projections for total marketing year export demand. And cotton, less than a month into its marketing year, already has shipments and

outstanding sales totaling 45 percent of the total expected for the entire year. We could see some adjustments made in export projections in future reports that could help improve the overall supply and demand picture. While any positive adjustments in export demand will help limit downside risk for these markets, I am not convinced at this time they will mean significant improvements in prices.

**Table 3.** U.S. exports as of Aug. 10, 2017, for selected commodities.

	SHIPMENTS TO DATE			SHIPMENTS + OUTSTANDING SALES TO DATE	
	Current marketing year	Previous marketing year	Percent change	Current year	Percentage of projected marketing year total
Corn	2,086.2	1,694.9	23.08%	2,223.3	99.92%
Soybeans	2,207.6	1,888.8	16.88%	2,248.1	104.56%
Cotton	0.33	0.30	9.25%	6.39	44.97%
Grain sorghum	181.9	300.6	-39.47%	190.9	84.84%

Current marketing year for corn, soybeans and grain sorghum ends on Aug. 31, 2017.

Current marketing year for cotton ends on July 31, 2018.

## Corn

Current futures price are in the middle \$3-per-bushel range. Despite improving supply and demand dynamics, this market has been unable to make a sustained move higher. Reports from crop tours in the Midwest suggest yields at average or slightly above average levels, but probably not at levels initially projected. Export demand continues to perform well and may force USDA to adjust its projections in future reports.

While there are certainly factors that suggest higher prices and while I continue to believe this market has some upside potential, my faith is starting to diminish the longer we go without sustained price improvement. I still believe the supply and demand factors suggest a price in the upper \$3- to \$4-per-bushel range. However, I am starting to think the market will need to see lower yields once harvest in the Midwest cranks up to generate enough momentum to push prices to those levels.

## Soybeans

Current futures prices are in the low \$9-per-bushel range. Export demand remains robust and is exceeding most market projections. This will help the overall supply and demand picture for this market and should help reduce downside risk. Also, early crop tour reports indicate pod counts in several large soybean-producing states are lower — significantly lower in some cases — than last year. So we could be looking at average yields at best for 2017. However, the high acreage number still means we are going to have a large crop in 2017. This, I think, will continue to keep some pressure on prices.

I continue to believe the strong demand will keep prices somewhere in the low to upper \$9-per-bushel range for the 2017-2018 marketing year. However, I still think there is some downside risk below \$9 if yields and production are higher than current reports suggest.

## Grain sorghum

Current cash prices for grain sorghum are in the low \$3-per-bushel range. If we only examine the supply side of the grain sorghum market, it would suggest higher prices. Projected production and supplies for the 2017-2018 marketing year are significantly lower than previous years. However, the problem for this market is the demand side. Export demand in particular has struggled in the past year to 18 months. Changes in trade policy in China and lower corn prices have impacted the attractiveness of grain sorghum in the world market. While I do think prices will improve slightly from last year, it likely will require some help from corn prices to push grain sorghum higher. I don't think grain sorghum prices will be able to move significantly higher just on the basis of its own supply and demand conditions. I project cash prices somewhere in the low to mid-\$3-per-bushel range for the 2017-2018 marketing year.

## Cotton

Current futures prices are around 68 cents per pound. When examining the supply and demand numbers for this market, it is really impressive that the market has been able to maintain these levels. Given the large increases in production and supplies expected for the 2017-2018 marketing year, we normally would expect prices to be lower than current levels. One reason is prices have remained resilient and have been stronger than expected demand, particularly export demand. However, despite the improvements in demand, it is not expected to overcome the big expansion in supplies. In fact, cotton is the one crop that is projected to have significantly higher supplies in the 2017-2018 marketing year coupled with lower overall use. And to this point, crop ratings certainly would not suggest any significant reduction in expected yields.

Unfortunately, I don't think the challenges of this market have been fully reflected in prices yet. So unless we get a positive shock from the demand side, I expect prices to continue to come under pressure. I continue to think prices for this market will average somewhere in the low to mid-60-cents-per-pound range for the 2017-2018 marketing year. §

# Preliminary corn OVT, demonstration results available

BY DAN FROMME



An ear of corn. LSU AGCENTER PHOTO BY MARK CLAESGENS

This year, five corn official variety trials (OVTs) and 18 on-farm corn core block demonstrations were conducted across Louisiana. As each of these plots is harvested, data is posted on the web.

[Click here to see the preliminary results online.](#) §

## Past issues of the Louisiana Crops newsletter have been posted online

You can now read previous issues of this newsletter on the LSU AgCenter website.

Issues going back to 2014 are posted [here](#). §

## Did you know? Wax protects sorghum leaves

BY DAN FROMME

Grain sorghum leaves are coated with a heavy layer of white wax, which helps limit water loss from transpiration. Grain sorghum leaves wilt slower than corn leaves. §



**Figure 1.** A heavy layer of white wax limits water loss. LSU AGCENTER PHOTO BY CAROL PINNELL-ALISON

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