

Considerations As We Start Another Crop Year

From discussions with seed producers in the VC and SE regions, peanut seed quality should be much improved going into 2021 compared to what we had last year. Tests have listed germination rates up and aflatoxin contamination down. Some varieties (could include Bailey II and Georgia 16HO) may see more quantity limitations than others based on a combination of interest and demand outpacing supply and location-specific production challenges in some areas, though on a big picture level the overall quality across the board should still come in much above last year. Starting with good material cannot be overstated, and everything we can do along the way between when we purchase and plant the seed will help from our end to maintain quality as high as possible. This includes storage. When possible, storing peanut seed before planting in a low humidity (55% or less) location with ambient temperature below 65°F will help to effectively preserve seed quality and germination potential. If available storage does not exactly match this criteria, storage locations that are closer to this target will be better than those with larger humidity and temperature swings. Reducing direct exposure to the sun during storage with adequate ventilation can help to prevent temperature from getting too hot or humid air from sitting and stagnating. Spacing out seed bag stacks can also help to increase air flow.

Seed with good quality should target a planting depth around 2", with 3" at the max and 1.5" on the shallow end. Deeper than this can make emergence more challenging, and shallower can increase Valor injury. New products claiming great yield increases are constantly coming onto the market, and while not all good products of today are the same ones that have been around for many years, it would be prudent to exercise caution with in-furrow fertilizers. If something looks too good not to try, experimenting on a limited number of acres, and not an entire field, will help to buffer potentially surprises or damaging results. Replanting a field is expensive and gets old quick. New can sound exciting, but a stick in the mud still stands for something.

Starting with the 2017 crop year through 2020, peanut yield awardees were offered to share certain production information to glean practices that might be common among high yielding farmers in SC. While individual practices varied more than others, there were some common threads. Most indicated they planted the majority of their peanut acres between May 1 and May 20. Specific conditions always are moving, but overall this timing confers several important benefits. Soils are usually warm enough by then (at least 68°F for three days in a row) to encourage rapid germination and strong stands. Early to mid-May is also a good window to avoid increased thrips, tomato spotted wilt, or soil diseases that can otherwise cause more problems with planting prior to May 1. Looking in the other direction, planting after around May 25 is generally associated with increased leaf spot infections. A third benefit for planting in mid-May is that this often leaves plenty of growing season to mature a peanut crop and allow time for digging, drying, and harvesting before temperatures cool off too much and slow the process any further, not to mention increased frost risk come November. Staggering planting dates and cultivars or market types that have different maturity ranges can help to space out harvest times to make the most out of available diggers and combines. This is likewise the case for dryland fields when digging conditions won't be known until the time draws near.

Tillage method was most commonly listed as either strip or no-till (out of 11 responses). From an earlier survey a few years back, approximately half of peanut farmers in the state reported using conventional tillage and half reported using strip tillage. Several considerations go into using one tillage method over another. This can range from using conservation tillage to reduce erosion on hilly and light land to utilizing conventional tillage with raised beds to quicken the soil warming up and help improve our ability to dig a peanut crop later on.

At a minimum, fields were rotated two years out of peanut, with three and four years out of peanut having been reported as well. Whether land was new to peanut or previously had peanut in its cropping history (most common), all farmers reported using inoculant at planting. In our tests, we have had more consistency with liquid inoculants when properly stored out of the heat, though dry inoculants can have an advantage when planting into soils with low moisture. Over many tests, we have not seen a yield advantage between different peanut inoculant brands, regardless of the price tag.

Among the 80% that reported having any amount of peanut acres irrigated, 75% reported having 70% or more of their peanut under irrigation.

Average digging speed was between 2.5 and 3 mph. Faster than this speed has been linked with greater pod losses.

Comparing practices across different operations can disregard relevant details. Regardless, the road to improved operations benefits from keeping a map of where we have been.