



# Field Notes

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## Planting is ahead of schedule

No two years are alike no matter what the subject may be. Still, the degree of variation in weather and field conditions is in a word "extreme" in agriculture. Having spent the greater part of my life working with farmers here in the Midsouth I tend to agree that the level of risk can be very high in this region. Most of this risk is driven by weather.

Corn acreage has been reduced this year, making possible an earlier switch to soybeans and planting progress has been almost unbelievable. In some cases, growers are already planting cotton which will be the earliest progress in that crop since around the mid 1990s. We usually delay the planting of cotton because of the high cost of seed and the concern over replanting.

Soil temperatures are normally the main concern for growers who want to begin planting. This limiting factor has not been an issue this year since soil temperatures have hovered in the upper sixties and low seventies (F) for almost two weeks. Prior to that soil temperatures were in the low to mid-sixties for most of the prime corn plant period. To say the least this has presented an almost ideal situation for getting the crop planted.

The level of cotton planting would be a wild guess but I estimate that we are approaching the 20 percent mark now. This

will be the earliest cotton crop we have planted since I came to work for Extension in 1991. The way this early planting will affect the crop going forward into the growing season is still at the mercy of weather, with rainfall being the prime issue.

Early planted corn will likely be taller, with more "quality time" for dedicating energy toward the production of grain. And if weather patterns are similar to most years the crop will have made significant progress before the onset of our normally dry period in June. This single fact could save farmers significant expense in irrigation and dryland growers will have a good chance to get their crops made before the moisture stored in the soil profile is depleted.

As for soybeans, the early maturing MG4 varieties may be shorter since they will begin blooming earlier. Fewer growers planted MG5 varieties in reaction to the red banded stinkbug. This means that the soybean harvest crunch will likely be at least two weeks earlier this year, and corn harvesting will be earlier as well since heat units are adding up fast.

Cotton will have time to produce more nodes, squares, flowers, and bolls. However insects will likely be more active since the mild winter may have allowed more of them to overwinter and begin reproduction earlier this year. If we can protect the

crop well we could see plants with two to three more effective nodes of fruit maturation, and that could translate into a big crop. Here again it all depends on the weather and mainly rainfall. The significant increase in cotton acreage could produce a record crop for our state if all goes well.

The development of Mississippi as a peanut producing state continues with established growers either expanding or rotating back to other crops while new growers are planting peanuts for the first time.

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## Conservation Corner

by James Cummins  
Executive Director  
of Wildlife Mississippi

It was early morning on the last day of duck season several years ago. Although I was mostly scanning the sky for ducks, my eye caught the glimpse of what I first thought was a beaver. I then noticed it was a river otter.

The river otter is a carnivorous animal. They eat a variety of foods, including amphibians,

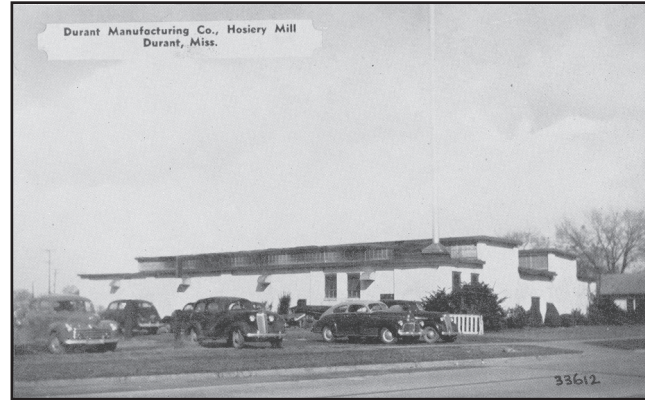
aquatic invertebrates, birds, crustaceans, fish, frogs, small mammals, snails, snakes, turtles, water insects and worms. They can eat up to 2.5 pounds of fish per day. They sleep during the day and hunt for their food at night. While hunting, they can dive more than 60 feet deep because of their webbed feet and stay underwater for up to 4

minutes. They will sometimes travel up to 10 miles in any given night looking for food.

Sometimes, otters can be a problem for fish farmers and private lake and pond owners, and it becomes especially bad during the winter months. Otters can be a very serious problem for those who raise and sell fish for a living. If they get into the stock, every fish eaten literally takes money out of the owner's pocket.

Otters can certainly cause headaches for fish farmers and pond owners, but most experts

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These mid-twentieth century postcards were given to the *Holmes County Herald* by Linda Frazure, manager at Howell and Heggie Drug Store in Durant, who found them in the store during recent spring cleaning. The postcards, made by The Dexter Press of Pearl River, New York, depict four Durant landmarks of that time. Pictured clockwise, Methodist Church, Holmes County Library, Delta Chenille Co. and Durant Manufacturing Co., Hosiery Mill. (Courtesy photos)

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