

Good weather, busy spring bring crop dusters to LC Airport

By Judith Brown
Staff Writer

Sunday's clear skies offered the chance for area pilots to be out, and the Laurens County Airport was busy with several small planes landing for fuel sales. The largest planes, however, were a pair of Air Tractors, the biggest single-engine airplanes in use.

The crop dusters were contracted with an independent forestry management company to dust area trees with a light-weight fertilizer.

Agro Flight is based in southwest Florida, but crew members came from North Carolina, Florida and Alabama on a two-week trip, which included three days at the Laurens County Airport.

"We got here Friday night, and one pilot got started but was scheduled to go to Ohio for training, and when there are a lot of fields to cover I bring my plane in," said the aptly named Dusty Hall, second-generation crop duster from Plymouth,



Photo by Judith Brown

CROP DUSTER — With more acres of timberland to fertilize in a short window of good weather, second generation crop-dusting pilot Dusty Hall of Plymouth, N.C., waits in the Air Tractor cockpit while an Agro Flight crew member uses a truck pump to fill the hold with lightweight fertilizer. The crews using the Laurens County Airport as their base three days last week while spraying timber in and near Laurens County.

North Carolina

Hall had been flying since about 8 a.m. Sunday, and had emptied and refilled his plane with fertilizer several times before winds picked up and forced him down about 1 p.m.

The work requires several people on a team, and Clayton Dale from North Carolina, Artavious Hardwick from Belgrade, Florida and Yousif Aldorkee from Mobile, Alabama, all are certified com-

mercial truck drivers but they are also trained in duties specific to the crop-dusting work, such as operation of the pump truck which takes the fertilizer from a storage truck and pumps it into the cargo hold on the very large nose of the Air Tractor 802.

"These Air Tractors are the world's largest single engine airplanes today," Hall said, explaining their wingspan is longer than the P-52s used at

the end of World War II. "They're big and heavy, which is good, but there's a lot more surface area to catch the wind. So, when the wind picks up you have to come down."

Hall said he contracts with companies and agencies for various tasks, such as spraying seed for erosion control, and he's working to become certified as a fire-fighter pilot as well.

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Grant provides mass casualty unit

By John Clayton
Editor

Laurens County EMS unveiled its answer for a worst-case scenario following Tuesday night's regular meeting of the Laurens County Council.

The agency took delivery of its new mass-casualty unit — a 20-foot trailer packed full with medical equipment and supplies — this past week. A nearly \$70,000 grant from the state Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) made the purchase of the unit possible.

"We have 50 backboards and 32 bins with various equipment and supplies in them to mitigate an incident," said Laurens County EMS Director Matt Pennington. "It also has four huge tents that are color coded for triage."

The unit allows first responders to set up and treat as many as 50 victims on site if a large-scale emergency occurs in Laurens or a neighboring county in South Carolina. It also includes a power generator and oxygen tanks that allow as many as 32 people to receive oxygen at once.

"It's considered a statewide asset because of the grant funding," Pennington said.

Pennington also said he expects the unit to be tested out very soon as EMS personnel conduct a drill simulating a catastrophe.

"As part of the grant, we're mandated to do a mass casualty exercise, so we're working on that with (County Emergency Services Director Joey Avery)," he said.

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