



The Observer salutes AGRICULTURE



Friday, September 24, 2010

The Moultrie Observer 16



Row crop farmer Shep Morris of Shorter, Ala., has been selected as the 2010 state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.



Dairy farmer Bill Haak of Gentry, Ark., has been selected as the 2010 state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.



Row crop and beef cattle farmer Brad Black of Vonore, Tenn., has been selected as the 2010 state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.



Plant nursery owner and horticulturist Dan Batson of Perkinson, Miss., has been selected as the 2010 state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.

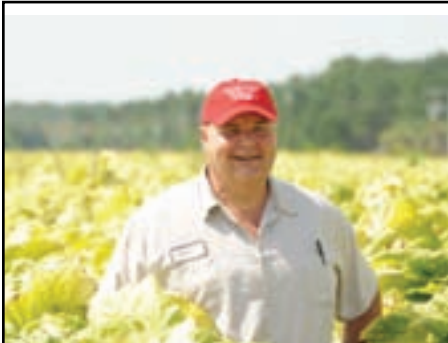


Vegetable and sugarcane grower John Hundley of North Palm Beach, Fla., has been selected as the 2010 state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.

State Farmers of the Year



Vidalia onion grower Robert Dasher of Glennville, Ga., has been selected as the 2010 state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.



Tobacco farmer Marty Easler of Greeleyville, S.C., has been selected as the 2010 state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.



Diversified farmer Bo Stone of Rowland, N.C., has been selected as the 2010 state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.



Row crop farmer Joe Nichols of Cadiz, Ky., has been selected as the 2010 state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.



Row crop and beef cattle farmer Wallick Harding of Jettersville, Va., has been selected as the 2010 state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.

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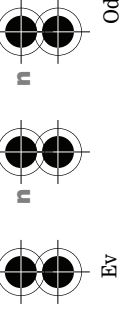
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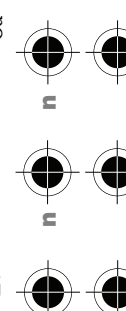
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Drought conditions expand into west, south Georgia

By David E. Stooksbury
University of Georgia

Mild to moderate drought conditions have expanded over the past month to include much of west and south Georgia. With temperatures remaining above normal and rainfall below normal, soils continue to dry across the entire state.

Daytime high temperatures through the middle of September have generally been in the 90s across the piedmont and coastal plain. Rainfall for the past month has been between 50 percent and 70 percent of normal for most of the state. The exceptions are northeast Georgia and the lower Savannah River valley, where rainfall has been slightly above normal. Over the past two weeks, rainfall has been less than half of normal across the entire state.

Mild to moderate drought conditions exist in counties south and west of

Currently, lack of soil moisture is the major drought impact. Across the southern half of the coastal plain, soil moisture is running at the fifth percentile. That means that 95 out of 100 years we would expect the soils to be wetter than they currently are in this region.

Haralson, Paulding, Douglas, Carroll, Harris, Troup, Muscogee, Chattahoochee, Marion, Schley, Sumter, Crisp, Wilcox, Telfair, Jeff Davis, Appling, Wayne and McIntosh counties, inclusive.

Mild drought conditions also exist in Lincoln, Wilkes and Elbert counties. The remainder of the state is classified as abnormally dry.

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coastal plain, soil moisture is running at the fifth percentile. That means that 95 out of 100 years we would expect the soils to be wetter than they currently are in this region.

DRY SOIL, MIXED BLESSING

The soil dryness has been a mixed blessing for farmers. For crops that are mature, this has made harvesting easier. The exception is peanuts. Producers are irrigating fields so that peanuts can be dug, or harvested from the ground.

Many crops have not reached maturity and still need some moisture.

Streams are dropping across the state. In southwest Georgia, stream flows are near the 10th percentile. At that percentile we expect more water in the streams 90 out of 100 years. In south-central Georgia, the Little River near Adel and the Withlacoochee River near Quitman are at record low flows for the middle of September.

Across northwest Georgia, stream flows are also near the 10th percentile. Conditions across northeast Georgia are marginally better with stream flows generally around the 20th percentile, which means the streams would have more water flow 80 out of 100 years.

WILDFIRE RISK

As the dryness worsens over the next few weeks, wildfire danger will increase. Currently, wildfire danger across the state is rated from high to extreme. Anyone involved in outside activities needs to be very cautious. Because of the dryness, any fire, regardless of how small, can quickly get out of control. Contact the Georgia Forestry Commission for specific details concerning wildfire risk and outdoor burn permits and requirements.

Dryness across the state is expected to increase over the next several weeks unless Georgia receives beneficial rains from one or more tropical disturbances, such as a tropical storm or hurricane.

Through the winter, the

dryness may increase. The ocean-atmosphere system has switched to a La Niña pattern. The La Niña pattern is associated with dry, warm winters across much of the Southeast. This means that we may have minimal recharge of the hydrologic system this winter. This increases the probability of widespread and significant drought for next year. It is too early to tell exactly how the La Niña pattern will impact Georgia, but we need to be aware of the possible short-term tropical impacts and the long-term drought impacts.

Up-to-date information on dry conditions across Georgia can be found at www.georgiadrought.org. Updated weather conditions can be found at www.georgiaweather.net.

Goat meat demand increasing in Georgia

By Stephanie Schupska
University of Georgia

A boom in demand and an economic need to diversify has many Georgians looking to produce goat meat. To meet the informational need, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension recently graduated its first ever class of Master Goat Farmers.

Seventy-five people, mostly from northeast Georgia, attended the program in Athens, Ga., Organizers expected 35 to 40 participants.

"I think now we're going to get a lot more requests for information," said Banks County Extension coordinator Bob Waldorf, "because a lot of people found out about the Master Goat Farmers program late and realized we are providing education on it."

Elbert County Extension coordinator Clay Talton had 13 farmers travel 45 minutes from Elberton to Athens for the 6-week program. A Coweta County farmer traveled two hours each way.

Goat farming "is a relatively new farming system for a lot of people who are here," Talton said. He used the meetings as a way to gauge the need in his county for more goat production education.

"The clientele who need this information are definitely there," he said.

The Master Goat Farmer program covered basic information on nutrition, goat selection, reproduction, birthing, predator control, health, diseases, carcass evaluation and

Please see MEAT, Page 3C

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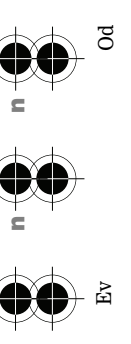
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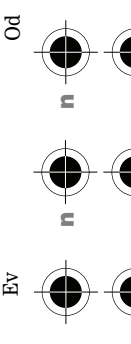
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Continued from Page 2C

Meat

marketing. The main emphasis was on goat meat production, but they also briefly covered dairy goats.

Jasper County Extension agent Lucy Ray assisted with the meetings so that she could better help goat farmers in her county.

"The goat meat market went down when the economy tanked," she said, "but it seems to be coming back fairly strong. I had a producer tell me that it's as strong now as it ever was."

Goat meat production in Georgia is increasing thanks to the influx of people from Hispanic and Caribbean countries and those of Muslim faith. Goats were a \$16.4 million business in 2009, almost \$10 million more than in 2001.

Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in Georgia, said UGA Extension livestock economist Curt Lacy, who taught the group about marketing. Eight percent of people in Georgia are now Hispanic or of Hispanic descent. Muslims make up 2.1 percent of the state's population, and most of them are African-Americans.

"Everybody in the world eats goats except us," said Washington County Extension coordinator Sidney Law. "In Atlanta, Ga., 2,500 goats are eaten weekly by somebody."

Producers only need between 5 and 15 acres to raise goats, Lacy said. He added that the increase in goat farming is partly due to the "whole movement of going back to simpler, smaller farms, old-school type of food and a renewal and interest in all different types of foods."

"And when you watch Food Network and see people mention goat meat or goat cheese, there's suddenly an interest there," Lacy said.

Monroe County goat farmer Jerry Norton got into the business one goat at a time.

"We had a horse and wanted a goat to be its friend," he said, after saying his granddaughters and daughter initiated the goat purchases. One goat led to another. Now he and his wife have 15.

"The two-year-old and eight-year-old like to say that 'Poppy's in the goat business,'" said Norton, who's a retired insurance adjuster. "We've had good times and bad. Now they're all like dogs running around. They want to get in the golf cart with me, and we take them on walks in the evening."

One year later, kudzu bug spreads across the state

By Sharon Dowdy
University of Georgia

Just shy of a year from when it was first spotted in northeast Georgia, the insect now commonly called the "kudzu bug" continues to mystify homeowners and agricultural researchers.

A native of India and China, the bean plataspid (*Megacopta cribraria*) is pea-sized and brown with a broad posterior.

A legume-eater, its favorite menu items include both the famous weed kudzu and soybeans, a crop grown in Georgia for its oil.

OVERWINTERS AROUND HOMES

Also commonly called lablab bug and globular stink bug, the newcomer releases a chemical - similar to the stink bug - when threatened. As kudzu is killed by fall frost, it may soon overwinter in droves

around homes, something the more-common Asian lady beetle does.

"The difference is the bean plataspid is far more numerous than the lady bug," said Wayne Gardner, an entomologist with the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

It likes to congregate on the sides of light-colored homes and vehicles, Gardner said. This time of year, the insects are most active in the afternoon when it's warm. Homeowners who live near kudzu patches can expect to see the kudzu bug as the weather turns cooler.

SPREADING ACROSS THE SOUTH

Gardner is one of a team of CAES scientists working to identify the insect's habits (other than munching on kudzu) and determine whether it will wreak havoc on Georgia's soybean crop.

Last fall, the bug was reported in Barrow, Clarke, Greene, Gwinnett, Hall, Jackson, Oconee and Walton counties. It can now be found in 68 counties as far south as Dooly County. "We expect to see it in additional counties this year before winter

temperatures stop its spread for this growing season," Gardner said.

He's also seen the pest in the Carolinas and expects it to arrive in Alabama and Tennessee soon.

UGA entomologist Dan

Please see **BUG**, Page 4C

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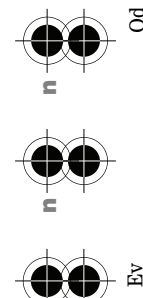
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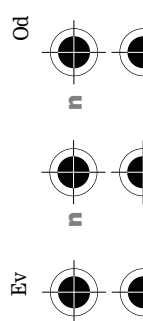
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Continued from Page 3C

Bug

Suiter believes the bug arrived here by accident.

"We do have the world's busiest airport here (in Georgia), but we'll never know how the bug first got here," Suiter said. "When it found kudzu here, it found a food source, and it doesn't have any natural enemies here that we are aware of."

It's an "invasive species feeding on an invasive species," he said.

STUDYING ITS HABITS, BIOLOGY

On the UGA campus in Griffin, Ga., Gardner and his staff are collecting bugs from various sites across the state and raising them in small plastic arenas containing kudzu leaves.

"In our labs, we're trying to determine if they die from anything naturally," Gardner said.

Introduced to the U.S. in 1876 from Japan, kudzu was planted in the 1930s to control soil erosion. It now tops the nation's invasive species list. The researchers have no idea what the insect's long-term impact on kudzu will be.

"It eats kudzu, which is good. But it also stinks and gets on homes, which is bad," Gardner said. "And the ominous

threat is that it eats soybeans and other legume crops."

HOW AND WHETHER TO CONTROL

In India and China, manually removing them is the most common way to control kudzu bugs. UGA scientists also want to determine how to control the pest around homes and whether or not to control it on agricultural crops.

"In soybeans right now, they are there in very high numbers in some locations," said Phillip Roberts, a CAES entomologist studying the bug's effect on agriculture.

Roberts has studies in fields to determine whether it's more economical to treat the pest or leave fields untreated.

"It's a true bug, but with needle-like mouthparts," he said. "It feeds on stems, sap, leaves and petioles. The one observation we have made is it does not appear to feed on the developing pods, thank goodness."

Each year, Georgia farmers plant about 350,000 acres of soybeans, which are primarily crushed for the cooking oil. Livestock animals are fed the leftover meal.

Armyworms march across Georgia lawns

Almost every year in late summer, caterpillars invade turfgrass across Georgia. Damage to established turf is mostly aesthetic, but newly planted sod or sprigged areas can be severely damaged or even killed.

Several caterpillars can damage turfgrass, but in late summer most of the problems are caused by fall armyworms. Their favorite turf to feed upon is bermudagrass.

EGGS HATCH IN JUST DAYS

Adult armyworm moths are active at night. Females lay eggs in masses of 50 to several hundred. Eggs hatch in a few days, and the young larvae begin to feed on leaf tissue. As the worms grow, they consume entire leaves of grass.

Armyworms are most active early and late in the day, spending the hotter hours down near the soil in the shade. Larvae feed

for 2 to 3 weeks before pupating in the soil. Moths emerge 10 to 14

days later. The entire life

Please see **LAWNS**, Page 5C

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Jane Hamm/The Moultrie Observer

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UGA Tifton lab sleuths plant viruses

By Brad Haire
University of Georgia

If a disease outbreak in a field could be considered a crime scene, then the "CSI" lab for such viral suspects is on the University of Georgia campus in Tifton, Ga., where samples collected from the scene are sent and tested. The culprits are always identified.

"Every crop we put in fields is susceptible to many viruses in Georgia," said Stephen Mullis, a research professional with the UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, who oversees the viral lab. "And what we do here in the lab is determine what virus is present

and at what levels." Georgia's hot, humid environment is good for growing many crops, virtually year-round. Unfortunately, that same weather is perfect for plant diseases, too.

Over the past decade alone, viruses have cost farmers hundreds of millions of dollars in damage or in control measures. And no disease has caused more problems than the tomato spotted wilt virus, the disease that prompted the viral lab's creation.

TSWV hit Georgia in the mid-1980s. By the '90s, it was at epidemic levels, particularly on peanut and tobacco plants, said Alex Csinos, a CAES plant pathologist.

"Necessity is the mother of invention," Csinos said. "We had a serious outbreak of tomato spotted wilt virus in the early '90s. Since it was a new virus and no one else was doing any kind of work on that particular virus, we decided for us to save some of our crops from the destruction from this virus we needed to start our own laboratory on site to take care of the needs and requirements of the researchers that were studying the disease."

The lab was established in Tifton, where samples could be efficiently handled in the heart of the state's row-crop production

Please see **LAB**, Page 5C

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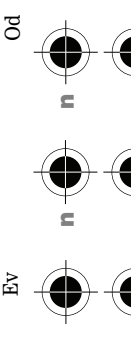
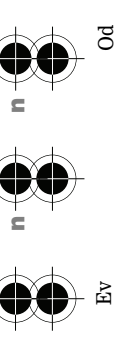
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Continued from Page 4C

Lab

area. Primary funding to get the lab started came from Phillip Morris International and the Georgia Tobacco Commission. One sample is typically a leaf, stem or whole plant placed in a zip-close bag.

Samples mostly come from research plots, where scientists conduct tests to learn more about viruses and discover ways farmers can treat or prevent them. "On a normal day, we run a few hundred samples. And in any given year we run 60,000 to 70,000 samples through this lab," Mullis said.

The lab mostly serves the state's tobacco industry,

which has declined in recent years due to many farmers getting out of the business after the government dropped its depression-era quota system. Farmers now contract their crops directly with tobacco companies, and profit margins are tight, said Fred Wetherington, a tobacco farmer in Lowndes County near the Florida line. Staying ahead of diseases is a major and costly problem.

Continued from Page 4C

Lawns

cycle - from egg to adult moth - takes about 28 days in the warm weather of August and September.

Weather conditions fuel the development of armyworms, said University of Georgia Assistant State Climatologist Pam Knox. Some UGA Cooperative Extension agents report this season as the worst they have seen in 25 years, she said.

"They devastate pastures and hayfields in locations across the state," Knox said.

DO THE SOAP TEST

To see if worms are present, perform this simple test: Pour soapy water on the grass (one-half ounce of dishwashing soap per gallon of water). If the worms are present, they will quickly surface.

Controlling armyworms and other turf caterpillars is relatively simple once the problem is identified. The old standby carbaryl (Sevin) still works well, as do all the pyrethroids (pyrethroids are those active ingredients listed on a label that end in "-thrin").

If the worms are de-

tected while they are still small, Dipel or other Bacillus thuringiensis-based products provide good control.

TREAT AT NIGHT

Since armyworms are most active late in the day and at night, applications should be made as late in the evening as possible. It is not necessary to water after application, but an application rate of 20 to 25 gallons of solution per acre as a minimum will ensure good coverage. Do not cut the grass for 1 to 3 days after application.

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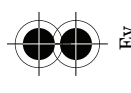
6533 Hwy. 133 North
P.O. Box 550
Doerun, GA 31744

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Phone

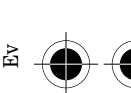
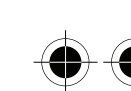
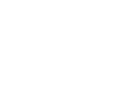
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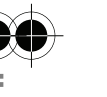
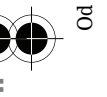


Sutton System Sales, Inc.
184 South Baker St.
Ellenton, GA 31747
229-324-3141



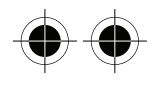
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