



REDUCING BARKY COTTON

Factors that contribute to bark are primarily associated with stripper harvesters, and can be divided into two categories. First, those conditions in which the producer has limited control, and secondly, those situations in which the producer can exert some control in reducing the problem. For example, prolonged periods of unfavorable weather that delays harvest and permits excessive stalk deterioration frequently results in barky cotton. The only option for the producer is to wait for favorable weather to resume harvest. On the other hand, the producer can reduce the number of barky bales by adopting recommended cultural practices beginning early season and continuing through the harvesting and handling operation. The goal of all these seasonal practices is to compliment harvest preparation and the harvest efficiency.

Some "do's" and "don'ts" practices that will help reduce barky cotton during specific parts of the season are listed below.

EARLY SEASON PRACTICES

Bark Reduction - Do's and Don'ts

- DO achieve uniform stand of 40 to 50 thousand plants/acre. Avoid thin or skippy stand that may result in large, branchy plants and high stick content at harvest
- DO maintain good bed configuration to facilitate later field operations.
- DO conduct early season insect control to promote uniform fruiting, desirable plant size and conformation.
- DO base fertilizer requirements on soil tests results.
- DO maintain a weed free crop.
- DON'T plant cotton in severe root rot or wilt infected fields that can result in premature plant kill.
- DON'T use excessive amounts of nitrogen that can result in delayed fruiting and large size plants.

MID-SEASON PRACTICES

Bark Reductions - "Do's" and n Don'ts

- DO maintain proper insect control through regular field scouting to insure uniform fruiting.
- DO manage nitrogen and irrigation schedule to promote normal fruiting and favorable plant size and conformation.
- DO maintain proper terminal growth. Loss of terminals due to insects, phenoxy herbicides, etc., stimulates lateral branching and high stick content during harvest.
- DO maintain an active weed control program. Spot treat weeds early to prevent interference with harvest.
- DO cultivate only when necessary to control weeds.
- DON'T irrigate cotton beyond the recommended cut-off date. Such practice can result in immature fiber and large size plants.
- DON'T cultivate too deep. This can induce rapid fruit shed due to root pruning and excessive moisture loss.

LATE SEASON - HARVEST PREPARATION

Bark Reduction - "Do's" and "Don'ts"

- DO use harvest-aid compounds on mature cotton.
- DO use boll opening compounds under certain conditions to hasten the opening of mature bolls.
- DO allow sufficient time after harvest-aid treatment to permit plants to dry down before starting harvest.
- DO use defoliant ahead of desiccation to reduce foreign material, especially in rank cotton.
- DO keep treated acreage in line with harvesting capacity to minimize regrowth and stalk deterioration.
- DO check the 5-day weather forecast to avoid the effects of unfavorable weather during and following harvest-aid treatment.
- DON'T rush harvest after harvest-aid treatment.
- DON'T expect rapid defoliation, boll opening, or desiccation response when temperatures drop below 70° F.

LATE SEASON - HARVEST OPERATION

Bark Reduction - "Do's" and "Don'ts"

- DON'T begin harvest too early each day.
- DON'T harvest damp cotton during the early and late periods of the day.
- DO make sure all plant parts and seed cotton is dry before harvesting.
- DO strive to harvest cotton in the 8 to 10 percent moisture range.
- DO maintain proper stripper adjustment. To account for difference in plant size and conformation, make necessary adjustments in stripper roll spacing.
- DO keep close check on stripper operation when adjustments may be necessary due to changing fields, varieties, degree of stalk deterioration, etc.
- DO consider modification in stripper paddle roll to reduce the amount of foregin material getting into seed cotton.
- DO attempt to harvest root rot areas (dead cotton) separately to limit the number of bales that become contaminated with bark.
- DON'T build modules on top of old cotton stalks or any crop residue in order to avoid the risk of introducing grass or stick material into harvested cotton.

The "Do's" and "Don'ts" suggestions are part of any well managed cotton production system. These recommendations in which management decisions can be implemented will aid the producer in producing high quality lint. Although grade reduction due to bark or grass may not be a severe problem every year, the key to profitable yields of high quality lint still hinges on the degree of success in carrying out the practices outlined in this leaflet.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Zerle L. Carpenter, Director, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.

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