

Questions regarding cotton stalks standing from the 2018 crop

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Corrie Bowen
County Extension Agent
Wharton County

This past week there have been complaints about cotton that is still standing in fields from last years' crop – with a reference to cotton stalk destruction. With the crazy, wet weather we experienced from September through February it's understandable that some fields could not be harvested, and that some stalks were standing through the winter. But now the ground is dry, and farmers have been in the field for the past several weeks.

To best address this concern I should probably begin with an explanation of what is required for Texas Department of Agriculture's Pest Management and Cotton Stalk Destruction Zone 3. Wharton County is in Zone 3. What the TDA regulations say in Chapter 20 Cotton Pest Control, it that in Zone 3 "all cotton plants must be rendered non-hostable by the stalk destruction date of October 31. Destruction shall be performed periodically to prevent the presence of hostable fruiting structures." Due to the weather that we had last year, a Blanket Extension for stalk destruction extended the October 31st deadline to December 1st. One key event this past Fall was the November 13th frost/freeze event that rendered any remaining cotton stalks or cotton plants non-hostable.

A cotton plant that is hostable to the boll weevil is a cotton plant that has squares, blooms, or green bolls. A standing cotton plant after the December 1st deadline is not hostable unless it has squares, blooms, or green bolls. Any cotton at pin-head square stage to green boll is considered hostable for the boll weevil.

What's important to note is that stalks or cotton plants from last year that were not destroyed can begin to regrow, put on new leaves, and develop hostable structures. Under the TDA laws, destruction methods must be complete by emergence of the new cotton crop. It is critical to prevent last years' cotton plants/volunteer cotton plants from reaching this stage for the overall success of the Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Program and to prevent the levying of any fees or fines for non-commercial cotton found in fields.

Tillage is probably one of the most effective tools for managing volunteer cotton in fallow situations or prior to planting any crop. However, in-season crop cultivation will leave approximately 15 to 25% of the area undisturbed where cotton plants can survive. Various herbicides will provide excellent volunteer cotton control during either the fallow period or growing season. To ensure the highest herbicide efficacy and eradicate boll weevil hostable plants, volunteer cotton should not exceed the 5 leaf stage at the time of herbicide application. Cotton plants at or beyond the 5 leaf stage have a high probability of surviving the herbicide application and becoming hostable plants.

The El Campo office of the Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation is calling those with standing stalks to make sure they are aware of the rules if it comes back hostable. The ones they have talked to so far say they will go back with cotton within the next week or so. These fields with standing stalks are disappearing daily. If anyone has questions or concerns regarding the Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation and cotton stalk destruction, contact Michael Hester the East Texas Maintenance Area office at 979-543-7770 or send an email to hesterm@tbbollweevil.org



Corrie Bowen, MS
County Extension Agent - Agriculture
Wharton County
315 E. Milam, Suite 112
Wharton, Texas 77488
(979) 532-3310