The Season

Although the drought gripping Georgia that began in 2006 continued for the third straight year, the 2008 summer row crop seasonal planting progressed normally in some areas. Within other areas the dry spring caused planting progress to be much slower than normal. Above normal summer time temperatures (especially during the very hot first two weeks of June) and drought conditions took their toll on the dryland crops. However, areas across the southern third of the Coastal Plain received some beneficial tropical storm rainfall. Greater amounts of irrigation were needed to produce what turned out to be a good year for Georgia producers.

Rainfall during the season was 9 to 13 inches below long term averages at the row crop variety test locations in the Piedmont and North Georgia as listed below; however, hurricane Fay dropped heavy rains on the Coastal Plain region in late August, thus the season total in this area was at or near normal.

Most crop commodity acres increased this growing season, one dramatically. Soybean producers planted 430,000 acres, an increase of 46% over last year and the most in 14 years; further, this acreage was 275,000 more than two years ago. Forage acreage increased 5% during 2008 while grain sorghum decreased 8%.
Crop maturity progressed at the 5-year average but harvest was delayed due to wet weather during late fall. Even though droughty growing conditions persisted during most of the growing season, overall crop production was better than expected. Soybean state per acre yield of 30 bushels matched last year, but production increased almost 4 million bushels due to the increase in acreage. Forage production increased 16% over last year. Although producers received higher prices for their commodities this year, the steep increase in production costs reduced profit margins (related mainly to higher energy prices).

Soybean rust was again found in south Georgia this growing season, but as in 2007 did not spread into a limiting factor. Apparently, due to the hot weather conditions, the rust did not develop into a major problem this summer but remains a very serious threat to soybean production in the state.