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Adversity Spawns Opportunity For Cotton To Aid Current and Future Oil Clean-up Efforts

Friday, May 28, 2010

By Shawn Wade

Through an innovative nonwoven product called Fibertect, cotton has quickly become a compelling possibility to improve the efficacy of oil clean-up efforts and positioned cotton producers as unlikely beneficiaries of the developing environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

So far efforts to clean up the millions of gallons of oil that have escaped into the Gulf have highlighted the need for a more effective material to absorb the escaped oil than the containment booms made of synthetic materials used in current recovery operations. This realization is what has opened the door for cotton, which is many times more absorbent than current synthetic alternatives, to become a major player in current and future efforts to clean up the environment.

Manufactured by Hobbs Bonded Fibers, Inc. in Waco, Texas for First Line Technology of Chantilly, VA, Fibertect is gaining a lot of attention as an alternative to the status quo and allow the product to claim a significant role in current and future oil clean up efforts.

By proving it can significantly outperform current oil reclamation products, Fibertect is poised to quickly move beyond its originally designed use and greatly expand its range of use in the future.

According to Dr. Seshadri Ramkumar, the products inventor, it is the product's flexibility that makes Fibertect a perfect fit for the type of large-scale oil reclamation efforts needed in the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, Fibertect used in its original form could also be used as a wipe to assist in the rehabilitation of wildlife impacted by the spilled oil.

Dr. Ramkumar, an Associate Professor at The Institute of Environmental and Human Health (TIEHH) at Texas Tech University, says that the absorbency of cotton makes Fibertect clearly superior to the synthetic materials currently used. And unlike synthetic materials like polypropylene that are currently used in many oil containment booms, Fibertect made from raw cotton and carbon is both reusable and ultimately biodegradable.

Dr. Ramkumar explains that Fibertect's underlying structure of cotton sandwiched around an inner layer of activated carbon makes it the perfect medium for soaking up oil floating on the ocean's surface as well as trapping many of the toxic fumes chemicals that are released as the oil

breaks down.

When first introduced the buzz around Fibertect was that the innovative, highly absorbent new product could make cotton a new player in the specialized market for chemical decontamination products to quickly and effectively clean toxic substances from the skin of accident victims or other contaminated surfaces.

With the recognition of its applicability in a broader range of scenarios, Fibertect, could well become the precursor to a whole new market for specialized cotton products.

Add in the fact that the product can be made from low quality cotton that isn't normally being sought by traditional users of raw cotton and it seems that the Gulf disaster may ultimately have a silver lining for the entire U.S. cotton industry.

High Plains Cotton Planting 80-85% Complete; Scattered Storms Filling Holes

Friday, May 28, 2010

By Shawn Wade

With cotton acres in virtually every stage from unplanted through the appearance of first true leaves, the consensus among High Plains cotton industry members is that even though planting has advanced quickly, emergence has been less predictable.

To date it appears as much as 85 percent of High Plains cotton acres have been planted heading into the always critical Memorial Day weekend.

Overall, observers agree the crop is in a good place relative to the calendar. For now, the issues growers are focused on include helping planted acreage achieve acceptable stands and protecting young cotton as much as possible to keep the crop moving forward.

Weather is always the Joker in the deck for High Plains producers this time of year, which means no one is ready to do more than agree that things have gone pretty well so far. Adverse crop impacts from seasonal perils such as hail, high winds and blowing sand have been nominal so far with little acreage requiring a replant thus far.

Scattered storms continued to fill in the blanks in areas where marginal moisture conditions in the seed zone have slowed planting progress in non-irrigated fields. Fortunately, the total acreage impacted by these conditions is estimated to be less than 20 percent of all dryland acres - a welcome change from recent years.

For growers being impacted dry conditions can't reverse themselves soon enough, even though they still have at least a week before most will have to seriously consider dry planting acreage to meet federal crop insurance deadlines.

In the interim, growers are busy seeding acres that have enough moisture to plant or are tending acreage that has been planted and is in the process of emerging to a stand.

As it stands things look promising for the High Plains heading into the often stressful and always unpredictable Memorial Day weekend and month of June.

Growers will obviously stay on the edge of their seats for a few more weeks, but with each passing day prospects for a good start in 2010 are

improving. That is good news for everyone.

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Editor's Note: "**Cotton News**", a weekly service of Plains Cotton Growers to the cotton industry and news media in the 25-county High Plains area, is mailed from Lubbock each Friday. Its contents are confined to news items and comments pertaining to the High Plains cotton industry which is so vital to us all.

Anyone interested in making comments about the contents of this column can call PCG at 806-792-4904 or Email PCG at: cotnews@plainscotton.org

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