

Episode Two Transcription

Here We Grow Podcast

Speaker 1 ([00:02](#)):

Welcome to here We Grow, a grassroots podcast by Southwest Georgia Farm Credit focused on education and inspiring growth down on the farm at home, and in rural communities. Whether you're a farmer or farm, her advocate, land lover, or southern dweller, we have industry experts and homegrown leaders ready to share their insights with you. Thanks for listening.

Speaker 2 ([00:27](#)):

Here we grow again with episode two of Here We Grow. I'm your host Billy Billings, relationship manager with Southwest Georgia Farm Credit. Today I welcome a lineup of fantastic guests. They're gonna share their fall forecasts and insights into the 2022 fall harvest season. Today we welcome Miss Pam Knox. Ms. Casey Cox Kerr. Mr. Don Shirley, thank you for joining us. First up today is Miss Pam Knox. Miss Pam Knox is the director of the University of Georgia Weather Network, a group of 88 automated weather stations across the state, which provide weather and climate data to farmers, utilities, extension agents, and private citizens network also helps the National Weather Service by providing real-time weather information and hazardous weather outbreaks to support public safety initiatives. She is an extension in Climatologist and UGA College of Agriculture and Environmental Science specializing in agriculture and climate change. In the past, she's been the, been the assistant state climatologist for Georgia and has also served as the Wisconsin State climatologist. Pam is currently serving as an author for the upcoming Fifth National Climate Assessment on Southeastern Climate. And we are very fortunate to have you join us today. Take the floor, tell us what you're seeing, and what you're working on, and then we'll have a few questions for you.

Speaker 3 ([01:44](#)):

All right, that sounds great. I'm very happy to be here. It's been a long time since I've done a podcast, so this is exciting for me. I moved to Georgia in 2001 in the middle of a drought and since then I've been through a bunch of droughts and some floods too. So my whole career has been kind of dominated by those two things. And I have to say this year has been one of the weather years that I've seen as far as agriculture goes. I was a little worried in June because, you know, we started out quite dry and we had some problems. For some of the corn growers that dry spell hit right when the corn was pollinating and they lost their crops pretty early because if you don't get any pollination, you don't get any ears of corn. But the pattern switches right around July 1st or so.

Speaker 3 ([02:25](#)):

And since then we've been in a much Rainier pattern almost too rainy because it's been hard for some farmers to get into the fields. Some parts of the state have been wetter than others. Right now the wettest part of the state's probably down along the southern border because there's a front that's parked there and it's just dumping a lot of rain. Of course, you know, September through November, our fall season is usually the driest time of the year, and so we expect things to dry out and we need that for harvest. But there are still some crops that could use a little bit more moisture to fill in. I think even more than the moisture, maybe the sunshine, you know when we have a lot of rain we can get more cloudy conditions, and then when it's really cloudy the soybeans and some of the other crops just don't really complete their growth as well as you'd like.

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Speaker 3 ([03:13](#)):

So hopefully we'll have a lot of sunshine. One of the things that I've been watching pretty closely the last couple of days in the tropics. And if you paid any attention, you know, there were all these dire forecasts at the beginning of the season that it was gonna be very, very active. Because we're in a *Nia* and typically in a *linea* year, we do have more hurricanes and tropical storms, but this year we had, you know, some early name tropical storms, and then nothing happened at all really from early July until the end of August. And that was really unusual and very unexpected for climatologists. We link a lot of it to the amount of dust that's been coming off of Africa. When you have dust higher in the atmosphere it heats up the atmosphere and that really stabilizes things and it makes it hard for any tropical wave to develop into a tropical depression and from there on into a cyclone or a hurricane that is finally starting to weaken.

Speaker 3 ([04:12](#)):

So anyway, it looks like, you know, at least the next few weeks probably will be fairly dry. And that's pretty typical for the fall. Now you might wonder what's gonna happen this winter while we are in a **La Niña**, and this is unusual because it's our third year of *Leia*. Usually, they last for one or maybe two years, but we've only had one since about 1950 that's gone into what we call a triple dip. **La Niña** is typically associated with a push of the jet stream and all the storms to the north. So the Ohio River Valley gets a lot of rain, but we tend to be fairly dry, especially in the southern half of Georgia and Alabama and then stretching along the coast. And if you're farther north and it's a little bit more uncertain because it's, it just depends on how strong the **La Niña** is.

Speaker 3 ([05:01](#)):

And right now it's pretty strong, but we don't know if it will stay that way. So what that means is we could see another winter that's fairly warm and dry could be good for some things not so good for other things. For example, for fruit. You know, they need a certain amount of chill hours to set a good crop for the next year. We had enough last year because we had a cool November but after that, it warmed up quite a bit, and then we did have some late frost. And that's always a concern, especially when you have a warm winter. So that's something to keep in mind. Also, if you have a warm winter, you have more chance for pests and diseases to overwinter as well, and certainly have seen some of that this year. With fungal diseases, especially cuz it's been so humid.

Speaker 3 ([05:49](#)):

That's something we're gonna be watching for next year. It means when people get started for the year, they're gonna have to be very careful about the kinds of chemicals they use when they're planting their seeds, much less what they're gonna be doing later in the year. So those are all kinds of things that we're watching. *Leia* is expected to go away. Often when we have *Lena* go away, we do end up with dry conditions the next summer. We kind of saw that last year because we did have that dry June, but then the pattern shifted because the lane didn't leave. And so we're not entirely sure what's gonna happen next year. We're in some ways kind of in uncharted territory.

Speaker 2 ([06:28](#)):

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Definitely, a touchy subject when you talk about rain and agriculture, especially near the harvest time because while we needed during the growing stages close to harvest, we like the faucet to turn off so our cotton doesn't get rotted and we can get the peanuts out of the ground. So

Speaker 3 (06:42):

Well, and, also we don't wanna be in a situation like we had with Michael where we had such strong winds that just blew the cotton off the plants. We definitely don't wanna see that again.

Speaker 2 (06:52):

Right. Most definitely. If you could go into a little bit more detail, just kind of about, the wind patterns. I know a little bit more now than I used to, but just kind of where the storms start and how they circle. I know you mentioned they come off the coast of Africa, but just if you could just for our listeners kind of just describe that, that climate pattern, I guess you could say it's more like a circle and I guess they kind of finally dissipating once they leave Northern America and go back out into the Atlantic. But can you just kind of describe that, that storm circle for everyone?

Speaker 3 (07:20):

Yeah, that I'd be happy to do. I should say that there's a seasonality to the tropical season and early in the season and late in the season. The storms tend to form in the Gulf of Mexico. There are not a lot of these waves coming off of, of Africa at that point. And as we get into about August, then we really start to see this train of waves come off. It's just part of the natural climate variability we see in Africa. But as those waves come across, they're, they're moving from east to west because they're in the Tradewinds Tradewinds, if you remember from elementary school geography move are, are blowing basically from east to west. So they get caught up in that and they move towards the west and then they can develop if the water's warm enough and if the jet stream is not too strong.

Speaker 3 (08:08):

Basically, the pattern that they're following is the subtropical high pressure that sits over the Atlantic Ocean and high pressure moves clockwise. And so if you can imagine if this is back to the days of clocks with hands instead of digital clocks if you can imagine a rotation that moves around like a clock face. And so, the storms will get caught up in that and they'll tend to move early in the cycle from east to west. And then at some point, they usually start to curve up to the north around the edge of that high pressure, and then eventually they can curve off to the northeast or even the east. Sometimes the high is stronger and it pushes the storms into the Gulf of Mexico. Sometimes it's weaker and they stay

Speaker 2 (08:54):

Offshore. If you're just tuning in, that was Miss Pam Knox. She is the director of the University of Georgia Weather Network, sharing her knowledge on the climate. And at this point, I'm now gonna segue over to our second guest, Ms. Casey Cox Kerr. Ms. Casey Cox is a six-generation member of a family farm. They farm on the Flint River in south Georgia. Her family farm is Longleaf Ridge Farms and they produce sweet corn, peanuts, field corn, soybeans, as well as timber. Prior to returning to the farm full-time, Casey managed the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District and is serving as the Executive Director for over five years. Welcome, Ms. Casey.

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Speaker 4 ([09:35](#)):

Thanks for having me.

Speaker 2 ([09:37](#)):

How's everything going for you in the field,

Speaker 4 ([09:39](#)):

<Laugh>? It's going pretty well. We're finally starting to dry out a little bit after quite a bit of rain, as Pam mentioned.

Speaker 2 ([09:46](#)):

Well, I was fortunate enough to go to middle school. Ms. Casey, she's an outstanding individual. And what was your, what was your major down at the University of Florida?

Speaker 4 ([09:55](#)):

I majored in natural resource conservation, which is in the Forestry school and Ag College down there.

Speaker 2 ([10:01](#)):

Very nice. Well, most people don't use their degrees, but I'd say you're using yours every day.

Speaker 4 ([10:06](#)):

Thankfully, I've been able to do that.

Speaker 2 ([10:09](#)):

Yep. And so I'm gonna let you have the floor for a few minutes. Kind of just tell me what's going on at the farm, what you're seeing with the peanuts, and how close y'all are getting to harvest.

Speaker 4 ([10:18](#)):

Sure. So we are, this is, this is always a fun time. It's, it's kind of the calm before the storm, so to speak because we are really gearing up for a busy harvest season. It looks like our peanuts and sweet corn might get ready at the exact same time. So we are, we're gearing up for a pretty busy fall season. We're still a couple of weeks out from digging our peanuts. We're planning our first shell out this week to evaluate the status and see how far along they are. Some of our neighbors have actually already started, and some have even picked their peanuts already, so they're, they're really early. But overall, from what I understand from other farmers, farmers I've talked to across the state, we're still in the pretty early stages of the harvest season. I think now that we're starting to get some dry days and some open weather, we're really going to see that pick up over the next couple of weeks.

Speaker 4 ([11:07](#)):

But for me, you know, the real test beyond doing a shell out and checking out the peanuts and our days after planting are I made my first batch of boiled peanuts last night. So that's when I really know harvest is about to get started. So, that was fun. Always a little bit of a seasonal ritual that we have. And, and Pam touched on this, but this has been a really interesting season for peanuts and, for all of our crops we faced some very unique challenges. We, you know, lost some of our sweet corn early on to, a late-season freeze back in March. But then, you know, when we got started with peanuts, it was pretty dry and then we had that extreme heat during a critical part of the growth stage.

Speaker 4 ([11:50](#)):

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So I'm really curious to see how that might affect the quality or maturity of the peanut crop across the state because I think quite a few farms were dealing with that. You know, a hundred-plus degrees for over a week in June, which is just not, not really the norm during our season. So really, really curious to see how that will impact the crop. And then as, as Pam also mentioned, we've had really wet conditions in the late later part of the season. And that's, that's really hurt us with, especially with tomato spotted wilt virus and, and some other diseases and pests that, that tend to thrive and, and show up more in wet conditions. So we're, we're really struggling with that right now. And, and I've also heard from some cotton farmers that are dealing with a lot of bull to so that'll create some unique challenges to our harvest season.

Speaker 4 ([12:36](#)):

But overall we feel like the crop is looking really good, and we're encouraged by this open stretch that we have for the next several days for some dry weather and sunshine. So getting excited about a harvest as far as market conditions go I talked a little bit to John Taylor at the Georgia Peanut Commission to get a sense of the market, the market conditions in Georgia in the context of what they look like across the country and really in a global scale. And you know, from, from what he told me, it seems like contracts are at about \$600 right now. And there are actually some pretty tough weather conditions domestically and abroad in, in other peanut-growing regions. So I, I think that price will hold and, and it would be great if it even went up from there you know, towards the, towards the end of the season depending on what we see.

Speaker 4 ([13:28](#)):

So here, here in the United States, Texas is having a really tough season, a lot of drought in the southwest and, and they're definitely struggling with that kind of the opposite of the, of, of the problem that we're having with a little too much rain. They're just not getting enough. And then, it was really interesting to note that at the beginning of this month, Bloomberg came out with an article about China's peanut production cuz China is about the, produces about a third of the global peanut output. And Bloomberg according to analysts, that they had worked with them, because of the extreme weather that's going on in China during their key growing and harvest period, they're, they're seeing some empty shells and nu list pods and they're estimating potential 30% drop in production in China, which will have huge implications in the global market and especially for us here in, in Georgia and the United States.

Speaker 4 ([14:25](#)):

Because, and, and it may bring up the demand for our crop and it'll also potentially increase the value because China's big and, and peanut oil. And, so that's obviously a market for our, our lesser quality peanuts or our smaller kernels. And so some of those lesser quality lower value products may actually increase in value, which will impact the holistic value of the farmer stock peanut and, hopefully, drive that up. So that's, that's a little bit of a snapshot of peanut, what peanut harvest is looking like from our perspective, at least on our farm and in our community. And, then a little bit about the market conditions, that we're seeing right now.

Speaker 2 ([15:07](#)):

Very nice. Well, thank you, Casey. If y'all are just tuning in, that was Casey Cox Kerr with Longleaf Ridge Farms out of South Georgia. And Casey, if I could ask you, what is your favorite crop to grow?

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Speaker 4 ([15:21](#)):

That's tough. Peanuts are a really fun crop. There's just, there's something special about them and, and the role that they play in our system. It is with being Legos nitrogen fixing and it's sustainable and very tasty, but it, you just really can't be going out and, and getting a fresh batch of, of peanuts and enjoying those or boiling those. And but, but I'm pretty partial to Sweet Corn too, so it's hard to choose between those two also. I'll save both.

Speaker 2 ([15:48](#)):

Casey, thank you so much for that information. And keep doing what you're doing. You're, you're a great representative for our local community as well as women in Ag, so keep kicking butt.

Speaker 4 ([15:58](#)):

Thank you, Billy.

Speaker 2 ([15:59](#)):

All right. Our third and final guest today is Mr. Don Shirley. This guy has got a very long bio, but I'm gonna, I'm gonna shorten it down for everybody. But Don is a retired University of Georgia Cotton Economist. He spent 28 years on the UGA Tifton campus. He has continued his cotton work through the industry, sponsorships, contracts, and grants, as well as with consulting, print, and online media. With over 32 years experiencing in cotton. Don is widely considered by the industry and his peers as the nation's leading cotton expert. He's a recipient of some of the UGA and College Ag environmental science highest awards for public service and outreach. Don also teaches part-time at AAC and also works part-time as the director of marketing and risk management for a G. Welcome, Mr. Don.

Speaker 5 ([16:49](#)):

I thought you said you were going to shorten that.

Speaker 2 ([16:51](#)):

Well, this is the shortened version. You know, I did get a three-pager that we condensed down, but we appreciate you and our other two guests today. And, and like, like the two previous guests, I'm gonna let you have the floor for a minute, just kind of tell us what you're seeing in the cotton industry, and then we'll have a few questions for you.

Speaker 5 ([17:06](#)):

The best way I know to describe the situation and price so far for the 2022 crop has been trying to search for some sort of balance between supply concerns and uncertainties that we have on the demand side. I started to call that a tug of war, but it's not. It's it, the market's trying to find a balancing act. On the supply concerns side, the Texas crop, especially in west Texas, the panhandle and Plains area, and even in Oklahoma has been a disaster zone from the beginning. It was dry when it was planted, it remained dry. The latest USDA estimate is that 68% of the cotton acres that were planted in Texas this year will not be harvested. So the Texas situation, like I said, has been, has been bad from the beginning. In addition, more recently now we've had heavy rains and everybody's heard about the flooding in the midsouth.

Speaker 5 ([18:15](#)):

We've had heavy rains in the midsouth that may yet be determined, but may call yields losses. And even here in Georgia, we've had persistent rains on a daily and weekly basis. We've had

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cloudy conditions. All of this has hampered defoliation and has likely raised yield loss due to bull rock. So with all this said, and I know it sounds crazy, the latest USDA estimate made it made for September increased the size of our cotton crop, from the August estimate. Now, this is not because the crop condition got better, it hasn't. It's because U S D A revised the AC acres planted number based on FSA-certified acreage reports that have started coming in now. So we did increase the size of the crop, but it was due to going back and plugging in some more acres. Speaker 5 (19:18):

Now, crop concerns like these have been a force to drive prices higher, okay, but that supply concern has sometimes been all set by signals of weakness and uncertainty on the demand side that would, that tends to pull, try to pull prices lower. In other words, yes, the US crop is short, but the demand is weak, so it's less important than it otherwise would be that we've got a short crop. Some of the concerns and signals that we've seen on the demand side and some of the pressures that have been driving prices, lower inflation weekly exports, reports that are good some weeks and horrible other weeks, a resurgence of covid in China, which has shut some of their economies down and has shut some of their ports down and not taking shipments, increasing interest rates a strong US dollar. The dollar some weeks will spike up.

Speaker 5 (20:32):

Some weeks it'll go down, but when that dollar goes up, it makes our exports more expensive to importing countries. Now in terms of kinda where prices have been since last spring, prices have varied from a low of around 70 cents. And I'm talking in generality here to highs of over a dollar 20. Prices were around a dollar and a quarter but then declined to around 90 to 95 cents. Rallied back just a few weeks ago to around a dollar 15, but now, or around dollar three, dollar five, somewhere in that area, but still over a dollar. Here's the key. I think most farmers are up to, not all of them, but I think most of them are up to 50% priced on their expected production, and the amount that they have priced is contracted, probably averages around a dollar, five to a dollar 10. Some farmers were a little lower than that, some were hired depending on when they priced and how they timed it.

Speaker 5 (21:52):

We've had a nice rally recently back to almost \$1.20 as I said, but I think few farmers really felt like they could take advantage of that because they have so much uncertainty about their yield and their potential crop. So they didn't want to crawl out on that limb and make a commitment any, any more than what they already have. And the big thing that is there are potential losses to bull rock. The, it's going to be significant in, in some areas. We always have bowl rock to some degree here in Georgia. It's part of growing cotton in, in the humid Southeast. But because of the weather conditions that I mentioned earlier losses to bowl rock are going to be significant this year for some growers. I think growers for the most part are probably, and I hate to use this cuz those that'll hear, it'll come back and let me know about it.

Speaker 5 (22:57):

But I think growers for the most part are happy with where they are price-wise on the crop at this point. But I think the less-than-expected yield they're going to get is less than they thought they'd get a month ago. Okay. the less than expected yield and potential fiber quality discounts are a major concern. Going forward into the kind of summary, I think the increase in acreage that I

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mentioned saw in the last U S D A report was a shock, but the market seemed to have accepted it fairly well. But here's the key. I learned a long time ago not to question the boots on the ground. Our farmers say that crop is not there. If they say it, I believe it. So I think there's a good chance, even though the latest USDA report increased production, that was because we found some more acres.

Speaker 5 ([24:10](#)):

Our farmers say the crop is not there. So I think there's a good likelihood the crop's going to continue to get smaller which should support the market. We've all also got weather concerns now in India and Pakistan that will help support the market. It seems the real key, and I know what farmers want, Farmers want us back in that dollar 20 areas. I think the real key to us getting back there is going to be on the demand side. We, we've got to have better demand and one of the signals we get every week on that is a strong US export report. The latest U S D A numbers increased our projected exports for this next year for this year's crop, but continue to lower and chip away at our world demand. So going forward, I still see this kinda searching for a balance between supply concerns and some equal concerns and uncertainty that we have on the demand side.

Speaker 2 ([25:20](#)):

I completely agree. If you're just tuning in, that's Mr. Don Shirley or Mr. Cotton himself. If you had a question about it, you need to get ahold of this man cuz he can answer your questions. Just to circle back and discuss one of the topics we just talked about. Bowl or, if you're just tuning in and aren't in Ag Bowl, RO is when is mainly on the lower part of the cotton plant. When the bowls begin to open up, moisture gets in there and then you don't get enough dry weather sunshine to dry it out. And that causes the lint in the bowl to rot and essentially be no, no good. Can you harvest the seed from a rotted bowl?

Speaker 5 ([25:54](#)):

Well, the, if, if the bowl doesn't fall off, this is the key. The bowl is weakened. If the bowl doesn't fall off or doesn't get knocked off, as the picker goes through the field, it'll be harvested. The concern is because of all the wet weather, what's going to be the condition of that seed? We've had a problem with sea code fragments in cotton in recent years. Some years it's so wet. We have cotton seed that's actually sprouting while it's in the bowl, still on the plant. So the answer to your question is yes, but again, that brings up another question about the condition of the cotton that you would harvest from it and the condition of the cotton seed as well.

Speaker 2 ([26:51](#)):

Right. Well, from what I've seen driving and seeing visiting customers, I mean the cotton crop does look pretty good out there in my opinion. We just gotta get some sunshine and, and get it out of the field and that, that seems to be the biggest difficulty. Come harvest time recently is just that weather, wet weather comes in leaving a lot of peanuts in the ground or can't even get out in the field. And then of course the bowl rot for the cotton. All right, well that concludes our podcast today with Miss Pam, Ms. Casey, and Mr. Don, we appreciate them taking their time during their busy season to speak with our audience. To read a transcript of today's podcast, visit our website. Make sure to subscribe to get information on our upcoming episodes and follow us on Facebook and Instagram for great industry resources.