



Pecan South

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*Tri-State group tours
Natchitoches Pecans,
hears first crop forecast*

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By Blair Krebs

Growers from Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi attended the 2012 Tri-State Pecan Growers Conference in Natchitoches, Louisiana June 14-15 and enjoyed time in a Louisiana orchard and a full educational program.

The first day of the conference was held at Natchitoches Pecans in Cloutierville, LA where participants toured the pecan cleaning and shelling plant and listened to orchard management topics. Mark Swanson, owner of Natchitoches Pecans, gave the group an overview of their pecan operation and a brief history of this area's fabled history.

Swanson purchased the orchard in 1986, but many of the trees were planted in the 1950s. To improve the orchard, Swanson has gone through the orchard through the years and taken out every other tree and lesser varieties. The orchard consists of 'Desirable', 'Elliott', 'Stuart', 'Schley' and numerous other varieties. A good portion of Swanson's crop is used in their retail operations including the entire 'Elliott' crop and at least half of the 'Desirable' crop. During the tour of the shelling plant, Swanson noted that during harvest season his plants runs all day. The machines crack and shell pecans grown in his orchard through the night, so that the retail cracking can proceed during the day. In addition to retail sales, Swanson also sells on the wholesale market and export market.

While at the orchard, Charlie Graham from the LSU Pecan Research Station spoke about this year's crop in Louisiana. At this time he believes that there is a good crop in both North and South Louisiana. Parts of southern Louisiana are seeing some scab issues, while some of the northern areas, especially around Shreveport, have been especially dry. Graham reported that there has been a "fair amount of 'Desirable' drop, but others haven't dropped." Due to the warm weather seen early this spring, Graham estimates that the crop is about 10 to 14 days ahead of schedule. At the end of the conference the annual prediction from Ben Littlepage estimated that Louisiana would produce 13 million pounds of pecans this year.

The following day participants moved back to Natchitoches for educational seminars and trade show. Attendees were treated with a variety of topics including bacterial leaf scorch research, managing pecan pests, food safety and nut allergens, establishing orchards, choosing varieties and exporting information. However, much of the crowd was waiting for the much anticipated pecan guesstimate from Ben Littlepage, who estimated the U.S. would produce 265 million pounds this year. The entire estimate can be seen below:

Alabama	6 million
Arkansas	2 million
Arizona	19 million
California	4 million
Florida	1 million
Georgia	75 million
Kansas	2 million
Louisiana	13 million
Mississippi	2 million
Missouri	1 million
New Mexico	55 million
North Carolina	1 million
Oklahoma	33 million
South Carolina	1 million
Texas	50 million
U.S. Total	265 million