

Field Notes

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No progress since last week on our verification field harvest. Yesterday the farmer cut a sample in our verification field in Vermilion parish (Jupiter) and it was at 22% moisture. We plan to resume on Saturday if the weather permits. Yesterday and today have been the lowest humidity days in a while. I got calls from Texas saying they are experiencing the same frustration as farmers here; they are waiting for the crop to mature enough to harvest.

I have given some thought to the uneven crop that seems to be prevalent everywhere. My theory is that the cold wet spring put selection pressure on seedling vigor which is not the same as germination. A lot of seed may show 90% germination, but could still lack vigor because the germination test is not designed to test vigor. The closest thing I know of is called a “cold germ” test in which seeds are tested at significantly lower temperatures than prescribed in the standard germination test. The differences in seedling development have continued throughout the season.

The reason we do not have a good seed vigor test is because no one can agree on what constitutes a fair and accurate method. At least that is what I have been led to believe.

The second part of the phenomenon is the continued pressure we have seen on fields from herbicide stress to water weevil pressure, too much rain and too much cloud cover. Engineers use the term “propagating an error” to explain what happens when an error in measurement is made at the beginning of something and further measurements are made from the next point and the next point and so on. The error increases in magnitude with each successive measurement. So each type of stress placed on these fields, from germination and emergence through drain has compounded the differences in maturity in these fields.

In one field a farmer told me he could pick out the drill pattern from the air as his rice began to head. In other fields one end of the field is a week ahead of the other. There does not appear to be a common denominator other than weather, especially weather at the beginning of the season. The oddest pattern I have seen is in one of our verification fields planted to a hybrid where there is more than the usual difference in heading within a single stool. Add this to the uneven heading in the field as a whole and it is the strangest looking rice field I have ever observed. Deciding when to drain this field is going to be interesting to say the least.

The only advice I can provide on drain timing of these fields is to drain the majority of the crop. This means some parts of the field will be drained late and some early. I hope this does not influence grain quality to the same degree as it has growth and development.

Below and on the next page are a series of photographs of Paragrass (*Panicum purpurascens*) taken in Iberia parish this morning.





At top left is a picture of the inflorescence which is a panicle but has branches without secondary branching like that of fall Panicum or Johnsongrass.

A close-up of the rachis and spikelets is shown at top right. The individual spikelets look a little like barnyardgrass spikelets. The rachis resembles what you might see in one of the Paspalum species like Water Paspalum or Dallisgrass.

The ligule is shown at right. It resembles the ligule of Creeping Rivergrass in that it is a row of yellow hairs. What you cannot tell from the photo is that these hairs are longer than those of Creeping Rivergrass.

The plant is quite robust growing over 6 feet tall. Some of the panicles were about 18 inches long.

This plant was introduced as a potential crawfish forage around 1990 and has become a pest. Dr. Dearl Sanders said he was given a specimen around 10 years ago, but it was the first I knew of it in Louisiana.

