

C. ECONOMICS

Will It Pay To Grow Skip-Row Cotton in 1966?

Walter W. Pawson and Aaron G. Nelson

From 1962 to 1965, skip-row cotton production was generally very profitable. During that period, skip-row planting patterns in which less than four rows were skipped--such as "plant 2, skip 1"--were widely used. In 1961, Arizona farmers grew only 13 percent of the allotted acreage in skip-rows. By 1965, the percentage of cotton acreage represented by skip-row plantings had increased to 55 percent of the allotted acreage.

In 1966 and succeeding years, skip-row cotton production will be less profitable relative to alternative uses for the land than during the period 1962-65. There are two basic reasons for this:

- (1) The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced new rules for measuring the acreage of cotton in skip-row fields in 1966. Henceforth, under the new rules, it will not pay a farmer to grow skip-row cotton in a planting pattern in which less than four rows are skipped, because the actual acreage of cotton must be drastically reduced if such a planting pattern is used. To maximize returns, if skip-row cotton is grown in 1966 and succeeding years, it will be necessary to use a planting pattern in which four or more rows are skipped, such as "plant 4, skip 4."
- (2) Under the Food and Agriculture Act of 1965, applicable to the 1966 to 1969 cotton crops, much lower prices will prevail for upland cotton than in the past.

Generally speaking, it will not be profitable for most central Arizona farmers to cut down on the acreage of other crops to grow skip-row cotton.

Nevertheless, many farmers can maximize their profits by growing skip-row cotton. Under the 1966 Cotton Program, the idle, fallow land in skip-row cotton fields may be used to fill either the diverted acreage requirement or the conserving use requirement, provided four or more rows are skipped. It will generally be profitable for most farmers to incorporate their diverted acres within their cotton fields by using a "plant 8, skip 4" pattern or such other pattern or combination of planting patterns as will provide enough idle, skip-row fallow acreage to meet the requirements for diverted acres. Farmers who have idle or fallow land that cannot be planted to a commercial crop because of the need to maintain their normal conserving base acreage under the 1966 Cotton Program can also profitably incorporate such land as a part of skip-row cotton fields.

On farms that produce very high yields of cotton--such as in Yuma or Mohave Counties--the production of skip-row cotton is likely to be more profitable relative to alternative uses for the land than it will be on most central Arizona farms.

Because Acala cotton responds better to skip-row planting than Delta-pine and sells for a higher price, those who grow Acala varieties may find the production of skip-row cotton more profitable than alternative uses for the land.

Price supports on long staple cotton will not be reduced in 1966. It will, therefore, be just as profitable to grow long staple cotton in skip-row patterns such as "plant 4, skip 4" as it has been in recent years.

Detailed information concerning relative yields, costs, and returns for skip-row cotton in various planting patterns compared to solid planted cotton and to alternative crops will be found in Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station Report No. 231, Economics of Skip-Row Cotton Production, by Walter W. Pawson and Aaron G. Nelson, February 1966. That report contains data pertaining to both upland and long staple cotton in various counties in Arizona. A farmer who is considering growing skip-row cotton may find the report helpful in reaching a decision on whether or not it will pay him to do so.

* * * * *

Estimated Yields, Costs and Returns for Solid Planted
Upland Cotton in 1966, By Counties

Walter W. Pawson and Aaron G. Nelson

Table 1 portrays differences that exist in different sections of the State with regard to yields of solid planted upland cotton, relative prices, and prospective gross income per acre under the 1966 Cotton Program, together with variable costs of production, and income over variable costs. The estimated costs and returns per acre as shown in this table are based on the assumption that 35 percent of the effective upland cotton acreage allotment is diverted to conserving uses.

(See Table 1 on the following page)

Yields

The higher the elevation, in general, the shorter is the growing season and the lower is the yield per acre, ranging from an average of 2.8 bales on solid planted cotton in Yuma and Mohave Counties to 1.6 bales in Cochise County (Table 1).