

Flax production coming back to South Carolina

Roy Roberson – September 14, 2011

Tied to wheat price



The exact price NAT will pay growers for flax will be closely tied to the price of wheat. The company will provide the grower with seed, reducing his out-of-pocket cost at planting, which can be important in keeping a good cash flow going just prior to harvest time for spring-planted crops.

Flax is not necessarily in competition for acreage with wheat, though some growers will likely cut wheat acreage to plant the new crop. Flax does extremely well on heavier, wetter soils and wheat doesn't like wet feet.

The time frame of flax is better than wheat for some double-cropping options. Full season cotton or soybeans, even peanuts are possible behind flax. In addition, the cutting and baling process for flax should leave a perfectly flat, clean seedbed to plant with subsequent crops.

Duncan says the biggest hurdle for getting the needed flax acreage in South Carolina is the growth on no-till planting. No-till just hasn't worked well with flax. It needs a well prepared seed bed that is flat and firm.

The ideal rotation for growers may be peanuts, followed by flax, followed by cotton. If a peanut grower bales peanut hay, he would have a near perfect planting situation for flax, Duncan notes.

“The main thing we are interested in is finding growers who can make a long-term commitment to grow flax. The company is flexible and will work with growers to get good growers set up to grow the crop,” Duncan says.

“Flax isn’t a difficult crop to grow. Insects haven’t been a problem. Italian ryegrass because of the seed — and wild mustard and wild radishes — can cause problems, but if you get a good stand of flax, weeds aren’t really a problem.”

Though it doesn’t look the part, flax is really a broadleaf plant. That could be problem in controlling broadleaf weeds, but the key to weed control is getting early growth and a good stand, Duncan says.

His company, Eastern Carolina Precision Ag does nutrient management work in a multi-county area in the PeeDee Region of South Carolina and the lower tier of counties along the North Carolina border.

“We will be doing the agronomic work for NAT and will be helping growers learn more about flax production. Farmers who are interested in growing the crop can contact me by cell phone at 803-460-7260 or at our office in Pamlico, S.C., at 843-493-2811.

“Or, they can e-mail me at rduncan@sc.rr.com”, Duncan says.