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It's (Certified) Ginnin' Time

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News Editor

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Local cotton will have a new edge in the market this year, as two area gins have been named among members of a new certification program.

As ginning gets underway this week, Quality Gin of Dunn and Sampson Gin of Newton Grove join other gins now certified through the Certified Cotton Gin Program, representing approximately 2.2 million annual production worldwide.

The Certified Cotton Gin Program identifies these bales to the cotton market as being processed under requirements that protect fiber from potential damage resulting from bad ginning practices.

Program Director Neil Turner said in a press release, "While cotton gins can't improve upon the quality of cotton they receive, they can take special steps to preserve quality.

"Many gins are doing this, but generally that cotton gets mixed into a larger pool with cotton from other gins not being treated as well. Certification helps the cotton that has received special treatment stand out in the marketplace," he said.

'Global Marketplace'

Wayne Smith, executive vice president at Sampson Gin, explained that cotton must have moisture controlled during processing to preserve its strength and prevent brittleness. But the 2005 cotton crop, he said, suffered damage in certain Midwest states when gins did not accurately monitor moisture, and bales got too

"The USDA said that cotton was unmerchandisable," Mr. Smith said, also affecting those growers' U.S. eligibility. "The (certification) program is a way to brand cotton, if you will. It's a way to give the buyer confidence that the cotton is what it should be.

"The cotton industry has transitioned into a global marketplace," he said. "Mills across the globe are better able to appreciate the role a gin plays in the process and they are starting to show preferences. More and more those mills are on the other side of the world and we want to make sure we are on their radar as a source of good bales."

Benefits

Each of the local gins serves approximately 60 customers in a 25-mile radius. Bruce Hudson, president of the Certified Cotton Gin Program, said he sees benefits to his growers in the new certification.

"It's good for us to be certified because it's good for our farmers," he said. "I hope this brings extra business to our farmers, makes them more viable."

While the gin's customers are the farmers, the farmers' customers are the textile industry, he said, and the certification sends a message.

"We strive to do a good job for our customers and that means looking out for their customers' interests. The gin's ultimate customer is the mill and the Certified Cotton Gin Program lets the mill know that it's a good bale with them in mind," he said.

Mr. Turner said the price growers get paid for their cotton by merchants and mills is based on the price the cotton bale receives. A cotton gin can positively impact the net value of a bale to a mill, but it is difficult for buyers to know which gins have the technology and personnel resources to deliver added value.

The cotton gin certification program fills that information gap, giving buyers assurance of how a bale was processed, he said.

Ginning Process

Mr. Hudson detailed that processing. As seed cotton comes into the gin, it is dried and cleaned, then ginned, which is where the seed is separated from the lint. The lint is then cleaned again, and the cotton is pressed into 500-pound bales.

Leftover cotton seed, about 50 percent of it in the United States, is used to feed dairy cattle, while the lint is used to make cooking oils, especially in the snack food industry, Mr. Hudson said.

He said of the approximately 600 gins in the United States, about 50 are in North Carolina. About 10 percent of large quantities of cotton, he said, and 65 percent of U.S. cotton is exported. Much of the cotton that is consumed in the U.S. is imported from foreign sources, he said.

Earning Certification

Lead sponsor of the independent Certified Cotton Gin Program is Samuel Jackson Inc., a company that manufactures moisture control systems for the cotton industry, Mr. Turner said. Gins apply to be certified and then undergo a rigorous inspection to join what he called an "elite group."

"The basic certification process revolves around things done inside the gin," he said, such as monitoring temperatures, measuring moisture and using the proper equipment.

"These (local) gins go beyond that, and these two have a long history of doing a good job."

"What's also important are the people in the gin," he said. "Some gins have outstanding equipment, but the people make the difference. You've got management looking at quality, good practices for the customer, and good people operating at the plants."

Promotion

Another benefit of the certification program is promotion of the branded cotton. Since the program was launched earlier this year, it has spent more than \$100,000 promoting the Certified Cotton Gin brand.

Promotions have included magazine advertisements, global mail-outs, brochures, custom video production, and a Web site, www.CertifiedCotton.com.

Quality Gin and Sampson Gin are now a part of that as well.

"Everyone who gins with them is benefiting from a global marketing campaign on their behalf and n importantly, good ginning practices, which helps achieve higher bale values," Mr. Turner said.

More Info

More information on the Certified Cotton Gin Program can be found at www.CertifiedCotton.com.

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