



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

Alternative Opportunities for Small Farms: Peanut Production Review¹

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Most of Florida's peanuts are produced in the northern part of the state, with Jackson County accounting for almost half of the more than 80,000 acres harvested. Yields have averaged almost 2,500 lbs per acre in recent years.

Marketing Situation

Peanut production is controlled through federal programs. For details, local USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices should be contacted.

Peanuts may be grown under quota or without a quota. Quotas are based on production history and are used to meet domestic edible demands and currently have a support price of \$610 per ton. Seed peanuts, with some minor exceptions, must be produced under quota.

Non-quota or additional peanuts are generally grown for the export market. They may either be contracted at an agreed upon price with a sheller or they may be placed under loan at the time they are delivered to the sheller. Current loan prices are less than \$150 per ton. Contract prices may exceed the support price, but will vary considerably depending on international supplies, market demands and other factors.

Prices for both quota and additional peanuts will be affected by grades. Inspectors grade each load of peanuts

when they are delivered to the sheller. Grades are a measure of quality and includes several factors. The same grading system is used for both quota and additional peanuts.

Peanuts that are harvested and marketed without drying are called "green" or "boiling" peanuts and are not subject to quotas, although plantings must be reported to the local FSA office. Producers of green peanuts must generally arrange their own marketing, which should be done prior to planting the peanuts.

Capital and Labor

Fairly high levels of capital are needed to grow peanuts. Estimated production costs in 1997 were almost \$700 per acre for quota peanuts and \$475 per acre for additional peanuts. Lower inputs would be the reason for the difference that is expected with the lower-valued additional peanuts. Using these estimated production costs, the price that a grower would need to receive to break even for his peanuts at a 2500-lb yield would be 28 cents per lb for quota peanuts and 19 cents per lb for additional peanuts. Break-even prices could be calculated for other yields.

Premiums are usually offered for seed peanuts, high oleic varieties, or other special features. These premiums, along with the costs for special handling, should be considered when preparing a budget.

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Variable costs for peanut production include fairly high seed costs and considerable use of pesticides. Drying costs are also relatively high.

Fixed costs include various pieces of equipment. Machinery needed to grow peanuts include land preparation equipment, planters, sprayers, granule applicators, and harvesting equipment. Drying equipment can, in special instances, be used for drying other crops. Labor requirements are minimal for peanut production and usually only entail the time required to operate equipment for land preparation, planting, spraying, harvesting, and drying.

Suitability

Peanuts are well suited for growing in north Florida, as they are reasonably tolerant of soil and weather conditions that normally exist in the area. Soils should be well-drained with a pH of about 6. Peanuts should be grown in rotation with perennial grass pastures such as bahiagrass, or with annual grass crops such as corn, millet, or sorghum, or with cotton. Peanuts should not be grown in rotation with soybeans, nor should peanuts be grown continuously on the same land. Nematode and disease problems will normally be easier to control if good rotations are followed.

Less than half of Florida's peanuts are irrigated. Irrigation will give a response more often on sandy soils than on heavier soils.

Varieties

There are four market types of peanuts: virginia, runner, spanish, and valencia. Runners are grown on over 90% of Florida's acreage. Current recommended varieties are Florunner, Georgia Green, SunOleic 97R, GK-7 Southern Runner, Marc I, Andru 93, and Georgia Runner. Recommended virginia varieties include NC-7, NC-9, NC 10G and NC V-11. Some shellers offer contracts on specific virginia varieties. Yields of spanish varieties are usually less than expectations for runner or virginia varieties. Tamnut 76, Tamspan 90, and Pronto are recommended spanish varieties. Valencia varieties are usually only grown for special purposes, such as for sale as green peanuts. Georgia Red and New Mexico Valencia A are popular varieties.

Cultural Practices

Peanuts are planted in rows 30 to 36 inches apart, but modifications include twin-row plantings or other row arrangements. Usually 75 to 100 lbs of seed are needed to

plant one acre of runner or spanish types with 110 to 125 lbs per acre for virginia types.

Peanuts often respond as well or better to residual soil fertility than to direct fertilization. However, direct fertilization may be needed if residual soil fertility is inadequate. An adequate supply of calcium is needed for the development of well-filled nuts and to reduce losses to certain pod rots and other diseases. Boron is generally needed to insure high quality peanuts.

Nematodes may reduce yield and quality of peanuts. Proper crop rotation should help reduce most nematode problems, but nematicides will be needed on certain problem fields.

Insecticides will be needed when insect population reach damaging levels. Scouting fields to determine insecticide needs should be practiced. Normally, one to four insecticide applications will be applied per season.

Fungicide applications to prevent leafspot will be required at intervals of 10-14 days beginning 35-40 days after planting, except when the Southern Runner variety is grown. About half the normal number of leafspot sprays will be needed for this variety. Fungicides may be needed for white mold control.

Herbicides will be needed to control weeds. Cultivation will also be needed in most fields. Two or more herbicide applications will normally be made, and many include combinations of preplant, preemergence, cracking-time, and postemergence applications.

Harvesting of peanuts should be timely. Harvesting too early results in reduced yields and grades, while late harvesting results in excessive field losses. Consequently it is desirable to have harvesting equipment available when needed. The hull-scrape or shell-out methods are good procedures for estimating the best time to harvest for best yields and quality. Determination of the proper time to harvest, combined with proper harvesting and drying procedures are important in the production of high quality peanuts. Drying facilities should be available for use as soon as the peanuts are harvested. Close attention must be paid to the drying operation. Avoid excessive heat and overdrying.

Summary

Peanut production is more intensive and costly than for most other agronomic crops. A thorough understanding of

the production practices and equipment needed are essential as well as a knowledge of the market situation.