



To the valued customers and stakeholders of the AMS Cotton and Tobacco Program:

Welcome to the first 2023 edition of the AMS Cotton and Tobacco Program (C&T) Stakeholder Newsletter. In this issue, we cover several of C&T's key initiatives and some of our plans for the 2023 cotton season including a video conversation with Dr. Gary Adams, President and CEO of the National Cotton Council, discussing several important issues facing the cotton industry; a highlight about celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Universal Cotton Standards Agreement, an impressive milestone, and our planned Conference in 2024; and a review of 2022 crop quality and our Module Averaging program. Finally, this issue offers updates and plans for installing automated cotton conveyance systems in classing offices.



The C&T Program is nearly finished with the 2022-23 cotton testing season with just over 14 million samples classed (14,084,330 as of March 9). This breaks down to about 13.63 million Upland bales and 452,000 Pima bales. This crop is about 3 million bales lower than last year's crop of just over 17 million bales. We anticipate classing another 20-30 thousand bales of Upland and a few thousand more bales of Pima. The overall quality of the crop in all regions remained very high throughout the season while the market was volatile with a lot of ups and downs.

After the program's challenging year in 2021-22, we returned to a more typical workforce and turnaround times in 2022-23. While we still struggled in some regions of the U.S. with finding and keeping seasonal labor, it was better than the previous year and we used creative methods to find available labor and offered more incentives to employees. We are hopeful that the labor challenges will continue to decrease in 2023-24.

We were very happy to officially open our new Lubbock, Texas Cotton Classification Complex on Sept. 14, 2022, after a long arduous process. The ribbon cutting ceremony

was well-attended and we were honored to have many industry, government, Texas Tech, and personal guests join us for the momentous occasion. The facility performed well during the 2022 season, despite the crop being lower than normal. This smaller crop allowed us to work through some typical growing pains affiliated with a new facility and new systems. We look forward to running larger regional crops through the new office in years to come.

For the 2022 season, in addition to the new automated cotton conveyance systems in Lubbock, the program installed new systems in its Memphis, Tennessee and Florence, South Carolina classing offices. These systems were delayed and adversely affected by supply chain disruptions. The Florence system worked well once installed and commissioned. The two new systems for Memphis only saw limited operation due to delays waiting on some final parts. All new systems are now operational and will be fully ready to handle the 2023 crop. For 2023, the program will not procure and install any new automation systems. This is primarily due to limited available funding coupled with the much longer lead times affiliated with these systems. However, C&T does plan to contract at least one office automation installation in the summer to be delivered and installed in early 2024. This will allow plenty of time for installation, commissioning, and testing prior to the 2023 season.

Finally, this will be my last newsletter article as I will be retiring from government service at the end of April. This will complete almost 33 years of government service, with the last 18 serving as the Deputy Administrator for the AMS Cotton and Tobacco Program. It has truly been an honor to serve the stakeholders of the program and I appreciate everyone's support, trust, patience, and business over the years. I have been fortunate to work with a lot of very dedicated and talented people who care about the quality of services we provide to our cotton and tobacco industry customers. We understand our position in the overall supply chain and we never take that responsibility for granted.

As I prepare to depart the USDA, my two very talented Associate Deputy Administrators, Ronnie Robbins, and Monica Alexander, are gearing up to serve in acting Deputy Administrator roles beginning May 1. They will each rotate in the position for approximately 90-day terms until the position is filled. It is not unusual for it to take 6-12 months to fill a vacant Deputy Administrator position, so both are prepared to serve in the acting role for as long as it takes. Ronnie and Monica bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table, and I know both will do an admirable job for the program and its stakeholders.

As I step out to close one chapter and open another, I want to extend my appreciation to our program staff for all their hard work and dedication; to the Agricultural Marketing Service for their tremendous commitment to fulfilling the mission to facilitate the marketing of agricultural commodities; to all of our stakeholders for putting your

confidence in us for your services; and to everyone who played a part in my career along the way. Thank you all.

Meet Ronnie and Monica – C&T’s Associate Deputy Administrators

Ronald F. Robbins
USDA, AMS, Cotton & Tobacco Program
Associate Deputy Administrator



Ronald (Ronnie) Robbins began his career with the Cotton and Tobacco Program in 1988 after graduating from State Technical Institute in Memphis, Tennessee with an Associate of Science degree in Computer Information Systems. He was involved with the initial design, analysis and implementation of the current Cotton Electronic Recording System used for the classification of cotton. In 1993, he assumed the role of deputy director of the Information Technology Division and served in this capacity until 1998 when he was promoted to director of the Information Technology Division. In 2016, Ronnie assumed the role of Associate Deputy Administrator of Operations. In this role, he has management responsibility for the Grading, Standards and Engineering, and Quality Assurance Divisions along with Program Specialists for Facilities and Equipment. Ronnie is also involved with IT operations for the Program.



Monica M. Alexander
USDA, AMS, Cotton & Tobacco Program
Associate Deputy Administrator

Monica M. Alexander is an Associate Deputy Administrator in the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Cotton and Tobacco Program in Memphis, Tennessee. Monica oversees the financial management, procurement, economic analysis, human resources, and administrative functions policy and guidance to the program’s 12 locations.

Monica has an established career with the USDA, beginning as a college intern in 1992. She has 29 years of service with the department, including 12 of those years with the Cotton and Tobacco Program. She served in various roles in AMS including a commodity grader (Livestock and Seed Program Grading Branch), agricultural marketing specialist (Livestock and Seed Program Commodity Procurement Branch) program and management analyst (Administrative Office), and assistant branch chief (Poultry Program Market News Branch). She held roles in other USDA Agencies, including the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration and USDA Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights as a supervisory management analyst (Management Support Staff) and program analyst (USDA 1890 National Scholars

Program), respectively. She has worked extensively with Program and Agency senior managers on human capital initiatives and broad agency administrative and financial systems deployments.

Monica earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1995 from Southern University and A&M College (Baton Rouge, Louisiana) and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) in 2003 at The George Washington University (Washington, DC).

