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Outlook '93

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A FARMER'S VIEW OF COTTON'S FUTURE**Marshall Grant
Farmer of North Carolina**

Cotton growers, better than any other commodity group, have worked hard and long to identify and work to overcome their industry problems, bringing them to a position to expect a solid future. By bringing all segments of the cotton fiber industry together, to sincerely work together, they now have a research and promotion program which has, and continues to improve its position in the fiber market, overcoming opposition from all directions, such as importers, national retailers and Government opposition, but in the final form all pitching in to collect assessments from all cotton fiber sold in the U.S.A.

Second most important success story, which our future is dependent on is a very complex farm program for cotton producers. Again, cotton has been successful because of its unity, to develop, with the help of strong leadership from Congress and U.S.D.A., a cotton program that helps us overcome the devastation of surplus production worldwide. By having a program that permits U.S. cotton to always be competitive in world markets, prevents the historical cycle of cotton buildup in surplus years. For several years this often left us out of competition in world markets, with a devastating effect on growers and eventually very costly to the government loan program.

A factor also lending strength is the commitment of the American textile industry to keep itself competitive around the world. After World War II, the U.S.A. provided vast amounts of foreign aid to help other nations improve their economy. Textile production received large amounts of aid because it provided many jobs for nations with large unemployment. Because of this, many Third World nations had more modern facilities than the U.S.A. Our textile industry has worked hard and continues to update their equipment and technology to remain among the most "up to date" of any textile producers and are systematically increasing the amount of cotton used at a fairly healthy rate.

A third, and I think significant implication for the future is what is happening in the cotton fields of U.S.A. growers.

The single most important good thing to happen to cotton production for the long term is the Boll Weevil Eradication Program. The program is expensive to growers and U.S.D.A (70% Grower, 30% U.S.D.A.) but has progressed to the point that the reduction in cost of production makes it necessary for other areas to also eliminate this pest.

This very progressive step came at a very important time for the Southeastern part of the Cotton Belt, which many feel will now be able to reverse downward trends in cotton production in the east as the west gets greater pressure from its urban neighbors for the use of its high priced water.

There is little doubt it saved us in North Carolina. We were down to about 45 thousand acres when the program began in 1978. The past two years our average is about 400,000 acres, this bringing with it a 40 to 50 million dollar investment in Gins and equipment for North Carolina alone.

Along with this is the promise of bio-technology which holds promise for all kinds of good things in the fairly near future, such as gene implants to make the cotton plant resistant to worms, the most important insect after the Boll Weevil. Progress is continuous and fairly rapid in improving the quality of rain grown cotton, enabling our research people to prove its ability to compete with synthetic fiber and permit our textile mills to speed up their equipment, improving their efficiency.

Farmers will continue to work hard to provide improved fiber to our consumers. If we can continue to get cooperation from Congress in the form of present cotton programs and the help of U.S.D.A. in continuing to assist in administering it and the expansion of Boll Weevil Eradication along with the research we must have, we will expand our industry in the next 10 years in spite of our problems with environmentalists and tight money availability.