

Final report for the 2017 Conference on Hot Topics on Peanuts

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This conference took place on September 19th, 2017 from 3 to 5 p.m. in the Merry Acres Inn, Alban, GA. About 100 people attended the conference and a total of 7 talks were presented. The focus of the 2017 Hot Topics was on “Food Safety.”

The first speaker was Dr. Scott Monfort, a UGA faculty member gave an update on the 2017 Georgia peanut crop. He said a total of 828,000 acres were planted with a predicted yield of 4,600 lbs. per acre. He also indicated for hurricane Irma, many farmers was able to pick their peanuts before the hurricane hit or the peanuts were still in the ground. Overall, Dr. Monfort says irrigated yields and peanut quality so far have been above average. Some of the non-irrigated yields were impacted by the dry weather in August. Dr. Stanley Fletcher, an emeritus faculty member from the UGA gave a presentation on US Farm Bill and market update. He mentioned many of the farm bill mark-ups will take place this fall and considered by the Congress. In addition, he provided an update on the Representative Peanut Farms. He then based on their operating costs and other expenses on the farm and provides an economic analysis on what will work or not work for peanut farmers across the U.S. Mr. David Prybylowski, sustainability consultant for the American Peanut Council, was the third speaker and he provided an update on the peanut industry’s initiatives on sustainability. He shared a crop water footprint comparison and shelled peanuts utilize only 4.7 gallons of water per ounce while almonds, walnuts, and pistachios use 80.4, 73.5, 18.8 gallons of water per ounce, respectively. Mr. Marshall Lamb, a committee member of the Georgia Peanut Sustainability Initiative, then gave a report on the Georgia Initiative. This initiative plans to gather initial farm-level data on sustainability efforts and provide data to better understand the efficiency, conservation and economic returns to producers.

For the special focus session on Food Safety, Dr. Anand Mohan, a UGA faculty member gave a presentation on the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and its effects on peanut processing. Different than the traditional food safety regulations, FSMA is focused on prevention. For peanut, processor must have a food safety plan with *Salmonella* control program to prevent ingress or spread of *Salmonella* in the processing facility and with enhanced hygiene practices and controls for employees, equipment, and buildings. Each processor must develop a process that can consistently deliver a minimum degree of lethality required to inactivate *Salmonella* and have an allergen control program. Dr. Francisco Diez-Gonzalez, Director of the Center for Food Safety at UGA is the next speaker and he gave a talk on the three main food safety risks for peanuts, allergies, mycotoxins and *salmonella*. He indicated that the prevalence of *Salmonella* in peanuts is relative low but possess a risk. So far, roasting of kernels in combination with microwaving is the most effective treatment. The final presenter in the food safety panel is Dr. Jack Davis from JAL on managing aflatoxin in peanuts which is a class 1 carcinogen and can cause liver cancer. The Food and Agricultural Organization estimates 25 percent of the World’s crops are contaminated with mycotoxins. He then discuss the important control points for peanuts during pre-harvest (seeds, good agricultural practices, risk of late season heat and drought), harvesting (timing and dry corners) and post-harvest (storage, shelling, processing) and how to prevent the spread of aflatoxin contamination through sampling and testing.