



# Guar in West Texas

Calvin Trostle, Ph.D.

Extension Agronomy, Texas A&M AgriLife-Lubbock

(806) 746-6101, [ctrostle@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:ctrostle@ag.tamu.edu)

September, 2012

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI**LIFE  
EXTENSION

# Why Guar? Why Now?

- ◎ Guar gum is highly valuable and sought after as an ingredient from small quantities in numerous food products to large scale uses in oil field services (e.g., a component of frac fluids)

# Yes, Guar! Yes, Now!

- ⊙ Uses range from a company needing a few tons to make tens of thousands of tons of food ingredients or finished food products, to an industry estimate of as much as 20,000 lbs. of guar gum to frac one oil well.
- ⊙ Can enough guar be produced for the oilfield industry? One frac job could require 80 acres of guar production (750 lbs./A)
- ⊙ FTS International, Ft. Worth, uses 1,700 tons of guar gum a month (3-4X current annual U.S. production)
- ⊙ Caremoli USA, 20,000,000 lbs. of guar gum as a food ingredient (~90,000 acres at 750 lbs./A)
- ⊙ Halliburton, mid-2012, guar gum was 30% of material cost to frac a well

# Guar Markets

- ⊙ Much of the guar consumed in the U.S. is imported from India and Pakistan as ‘splits’—the endosperm (which contains the valuable gum); the seed coat and embryo have been removed.
- ⊙ As a rule of thumb for “Aggie Math” understanding, the seed components are:
  - ⊙ Embryo, 45%
  - ⊙ Seed coat, 15%
  - ⊙ Endosperm, containing the gum, 40%
- ⊙ **Figure about 28% of raw seed weight is net extractable gum**



# Guar Markets

- ⊙ International market for guar and guar gum drives you nuts! There is no rhyme or reason to pricing or availability. A manipulated market.
- ⊙ Some companies suggest the gum quality of imported guar is better than U.S. production
- ⊙ **Is this fact or perception?**
  - ⊙ Texas Tech Univ. research suggest quality can be comparable
  - ⊙ Guar grades/quality for fracking vs. guar for food



# Guar Markets

- ⊙ U.S. companies need a stable supply, and appear more willing to pay the needed cost.
- ⊙ Due to volatility in the international market (which is controlled and does not necessarily reflect market conditions), interest rises in investing/establishing U.S. production when prices are high
- ⊙ What about food vs. industrial use debate?
  - ⊙ Blue Bell ice cream—the run-up in guar prices amounts to ~10-12 cents higher ingredient cost per half gallon carton which costs \$5-6



# Guar Economics

- ⦿ Guar is a crop that has minimal input costs to grow. Therefore the gross returns (which seem low), must be evaluated in light of actual (low) production costs.
- ⦿ Historically, guar is not a crop of choice if you as a producer must service a high debt load.
- ⦿ Guar production budgets @ <http://southplainsprofit.tamu.edu>



# 2012 Seed Price for Farmers

- ⊙ 2012 price is the highest ever, \$0.35/lb. for standard grade #1
- ⊙ Phone calls and e-mails: “With the high cost of guar gum, why isn’t guar production contracting at least \$0.50/lb., even \$1.00/lb.?”
- ⊙ The recent crash in guar gum prices might be why!!!
  - ⊙ As of mid-September 2012 guar gum prices were back down to about \$3.50 per lb.
- ⊙ “It will take \$0.50/lb. to get farmers seriously interested and off the fence” (especially without crop insurance).” Jackie Smith, Extension Ag. Economics, Lubbock





# Guar & Crop Insurance

- ⊙ Currently no meaningful crop insurance
- ⊙ Lending agencies may not loan money on guar without crop insurance
- ⊙ Currently only NAP insurance is available, and it may be not economical to justify purchase
- ⊙ Private entities may step in before USDA can conduct pilot programs, etc. to evaluate guar insurance products

**“Poor Man’s Crop” (India) vs.**  
**“Low-Input/Stepchild Crop” (U.S.)**



# Key Guar Considerations

- ⦿ Indeterminant, annual legume
- ⦿ Good for rotations with cotton, sorghum, etc. (1970's at Texas A&M AgriLife—Vernon: 15% lint yield increase the following year)
- ⦿ As drought tolerant—if not more—than any other crop in Texas (sesame would be similar)
- ⦿ Low risk

# Guar

- ⊙ With sesame, the most drought tolerant crop on South Plains
- ⊙ Low input crop
- ⊙ No insects or disease treated in production since ~1998
- ⊙ Target planting date: mid-May to about July 1
- ⊙ Harvest generally November-December in High and Rolling Plains (this is without harvest aid, which could hasten harvest a month or more)
- ⊙ How quickly can new crop guar gum be available? Could potentially hit market in December if facilities can process quickly (earlier with harvest aid)

# Yield Potential

- ⦿ Dryland: 400-1,100 lbs./A (typical range)
  - ⦿ Getting an initial stand is important; once the stand is established then guar is highly likely to make a crop even in drought years
- ⦿ Limited irrigation (3-6"): 800-1,400 lbs./A
- ⦿ Full irrigation? Not recommended
  - ⦿ Guar's relative performance to other crops is best in dryland settings, especially when droughty as long as the crop is established, but guar cannot take advantage of irrigation as well as numerous other crops.
- ⦿ WTG yield goals ~900 lbs./A dryland; ~1,500 lbs./A irrigated

# Varieties

- ⦿ 1980-1983, at numerous Vernon-area locations:
  - ⦿ Lewis ~100 lbs./A more than Kinman
  - ⦿ Lewis ~200 lbs./A more than Esser
- ⦿ Kinman, Lewis (less branching, more pods on main stem), Matador (Texas Tech Univ., 2005), and Santa Cruz are most common varieties--All are acceptable; see contractor
- ⦿ Breeding program can make rapid improvements, especially if newer techniques are coupled with ready assessment of gum quantity and quality

# Where is Guar Best Suited?

- ⦿ Grows adequately under a wide range of soil conditions
  - ⦿ Clayey soils are not recommended
- ⦿ Performs best on medium- and sandy textured soils
- ⦿ Dryland pivot corners
- ⦿ **Fields without heavy weed pressure**
- ⦿ Humid environments are not desirable
  - ⦿ Alternaria, bacterial blight, other diseases begin to take their toll
  - ⦿ Indi and Paki varieties are exposed to humidity during the monsoon seasons, may handle disease potential better?

# Herbicide

- ⦿ Trifluralin (Treflan)
- ⦿ Clethodim (Select Max) for post-emerge grass control after emergence
- ⦿ Texas A&M AgriLife has submitted info. for 2,4-DB approval to IR-4 specialty crop program for possible labeling as a post-emerge over-the-top broadleaf weed control option



# *Rhizobium* Inoculation

- ⊙ I have the same frustration as you: poor to no nodulation
- ⊙ West Texas research (Dawson Co.):
  - ⊙ Guar seedbox powder (an inferior product)
  - ⊙ Concentrated peanut liquid Lift as advised by company (*Bradyrhizobium*)
  - ⊙ Nothing! No increase in nodulation.
  - ⊙ Some 'seed inoculants' used in guar (e.g., Sono Ag., Plainview, TX) have *Rhizobium*, and other biologicals but may not be specific to guar



Rhizobium nodules on guar roots

# Seeding

- ⦿ ~5 lbs./A dryland, ~8 lbs./A irrigated; higher seeding rates (~10 lbs./A) may increase stem node length at the soil line, like in soybean, and ease harvest
  - ⦿ Old TX Rolling Plains research suggested that 2 to 10 lbs./A produced no difference in yield
- ⦿ Listed ground, 4-8" tall beds, can help harvest
- ⦿ 70° F for optimum establishment at planting
  - ⦿ This is about as warm a soil as needed for any crop

# Fertility Results

- ⊙ AGCARES, Dawson Co., TX
- ⊙ Being a legume (“guar is a soil builder”—NOT; it has to be nodulated); Nitrogen should not be a consideration
- ⊙ Two-year results on dryland guar: no measurable yield response to 30 lbs./A  $P_2O_5$
  
- ⊙ India: most common micronutrient deficiency is Zinc

# Insects and Disease

- ◉ None treated for yet in West Texas in 1998-2011
  - ◉ Alternaria, bacterial blight ('Monument' is susceptible)
- ◉ Guar midge (infects bud)--not the same insect as sorghum midge but is the alfalfa midge
  - ◉ Infrequent issue, but sprayed for in Hardeman Co. in 2012



# Guar--Profitability 'Keys'

- ⦿ Production as a primary crop is better than as catch crop
- ⦿ Wait to plant until soil moisture for germination/emergence is good



# Guar--Profitability 'Keys'

- ⦿ Irrigation response: ~100-150 lbs./A per 1”
  - ⦿ Caveat: 2001, Dawson Co.
  - ⦿ Dryland corners, 1,100 lbs./A (a good year!)
  - ⦿ Over-the-top sprinkler irrigation same as neighboring peanuts, 700 lbs./A (frequent spray irrigation) interfered with flowering, pollination, seed set, or all three
  - ⦿ Consider **drag hoses for irrigation** other than initial watering to get crop up

# Guar--Profitability 'Keys'

- ⦿ Experienced harvesters with right headers and can increase harvestable yield considerably
  - ⦿ Especially with air-reels, which I think are worth the added cost (\$2-4/acre) with the custom harvester
  - ⦿ Since guar has a tendency for the pods to break off at harvest (break off, not split open), the air reel blows these shattered pods into the header



# Air-Reel Headers



# Need for Harvest Aids in Guar

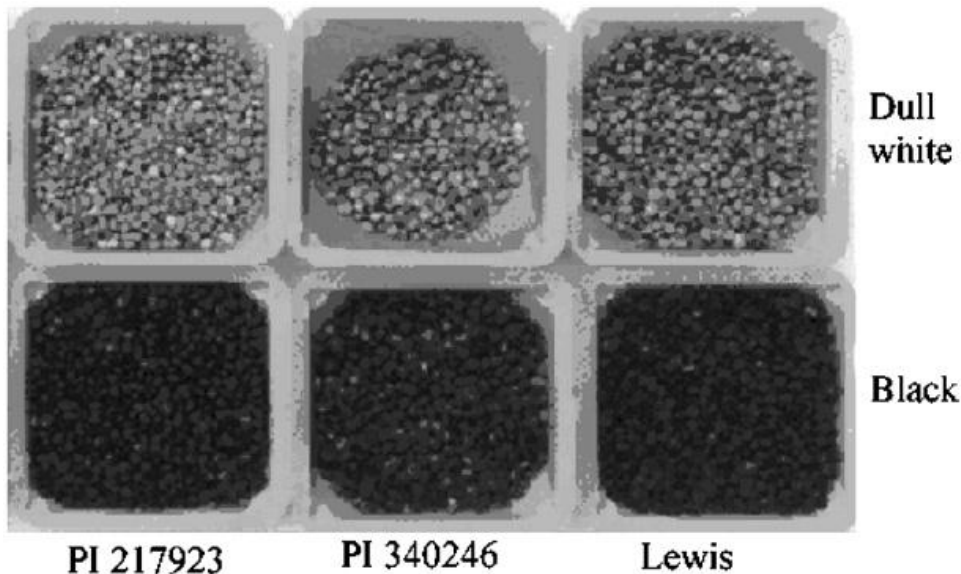
- ⦿ If guar remains in the field a long time waiting for a killing frost, plant death, and subsequent dry-down, some seed may turn black, especially if wet conditions prevail and harvest is delayed.
  - ⦿ This reduces grade and potentially reduces gum quality
- ⦿ Use of a harvest aid (desiccant, defoliant, herbicide) can allow earlier harvest and potentially higher quality guar gum product.
- ⦿ Black seed are seen as being lower quality, however, this seed in Texas Tech Univ. research germinates better, possibly due to small cracks in the seedcoat, which makes it harder to remove the seedcoat and possible some of it remains in guar gum

# Seed Quality

- ⦿ Germination %? Maintain as high as you can get, but some guar may have germ of only ~67% after a couple of years
  - ⦿ Long-term seed storage sees guar seed quality deteriorate to unacceptable levels after ~8 years
- ⦿ Guar seed must be free of morningglory! Similar size & shape seed that can't be cleaned out

# Seed Quality—Black Seed

- Texas Tech research on black seed, which is often assumed to be of inferior quality, and appears to be more common in the Rolling Plains than in the High Plains
- Germination is higher in black seed (better water uptake, degradation of seed coat), and endosperm content was not significantly different—gum *quality* not reported.



# Raw Guar Grading Standards†

These are the standard grades for U.S. grown guar off the farm. Contract price is based on #1 Grade, and will specify discounts for lower grade.

<u>GRADE</u>	<u>MOISTURE MAXIMUM</u>	<u>MINIMUM TEST WEIGHT</u> (Lbs./Bushel)
Number 1	13.5	60
Number 2	14.0	59
Number 3	14.5	58
Number 4	15.0	57
SAMPLE GRADE	above 15.1	below 56.9

†Grades courtesy West Texas Guar.

Guar price may discount for black/dark seed above a certain % as dark seed may indicate possible lower gum quality. Dark seed often occurs due to greatly delayed harvest, rainy weather after maturity, or both.

# Guar--Mistakes

- ⦿ Planting when soil moisture conditions are poor--poor stand establishment
- ⦿ Guar is not for weedy ground--only three herbicides currently labeled
- ⦿ Need to consider harvest method prior to planting--header type will affect flat vs. bedded planting; custom combine, \$25/A
- ⦿ Not using limited irrigation if it is available
- ⦿ **ATTITUDE!!!**

# What Growers Say Since 2001

- ⊙ Use higher seeding rates, maybe 8 lbs./A even on dryland
- ⊙ Water up vs. planting into moisture (preferred?); watch for crust
- ⊙ Reduced performance on ground which has undergone 'deep breaking' tillage (12-16")
- ⊙ "I like the condition of my ground after guar"
- ⊙ "My cotton looks better after guar"
- ⊙ "Roundup Ready "flex" cotton aids control of volunteer guar the next year (can be sprayed season long if needed)
- ⊙ Pay for experienced harvesters with right equipment

# Where Must Guar Yields Go? And What Type of Production?

- ⊙ Guar at 50,000 acres in the U.S. vs. 250,000 acres or even 500,000 acres annually?
- ⊙ Large guar gum users need major **consistent** supply to substantially commit to U.S. guar (quality considerations perhaps a different matter)
- ⊙ 200 million pounds of guar gum use in North America? That's about 700,000 acres of production at 1,000 lbs./A.
- ⊙ **We can't reliably achieve this with only dryland**—to make this potential viable and reliable, we have to:
  - ⊙ 1) increase yield per acre (breeding, GMO?, management)
  - ⊙ 2) produce some guar on irrigated land to minimize drought



