Cost to control boll weevil down

Louisiana farmers' first-year cost for a program to eradicate the boll weevil from the state's cotton fields was cut from $25 to $10 an acre by the Louisiana Boll Weevil Eradication Commission recently.

Cotton farmers will vote from March 15-24 on whether they will adopt and pay for the five-year program. Following a series of meetings throughout the 31 cotton-producing parishes, commission members found the chief concern of farmers was the first year's cost of the program, designed to eliminate the historic pest from the $500-million-a-year crop in Louisiana.

"We hope this revised payment schedule will meet the needs of our farmers and help ensure passage of the program," said commission member and Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry Bob Odom. "Cotton is our biggest dollar crop. Our ability to compete with the seven other southeastern states that have eliminated the boll weevil is at stake. Those states' acreage has doubled and tripled. Their chemical use has been cut 60 percent or more and their yields are way up."

Farm Bureau President Ronnie Anderson called the commission's move a "realization that farmers were being hit with a double chemical bill in a single year. We have cleared a major hurdle by eliminating that extra cost. Many farmers just wouldn't have been able to afford it."

Under the original plan, a farmer would have been charged $125 per acre of cotton over five years - $25 an acre in each year. The commission agreed to drop the first year's cost to $10 and add $5 to each of the remaining four years, or $30 an acre in years' two through five.