Cotton farmers report bumper year

By Pamela Glisson
Business Writer

U.S. cotton farmers just ended their best year in decades, and Louisiana is no exception. The price of cotton is low, but state officials predict that '91 farmers will bring in more than in the previous year, when gross farm value was nearly $4 1/4 million.

"It's the highest production — the highest number of bales and the highest yield per acre ever in Louisiana," said Dr. Tom Burch, cotton specialist with the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service.

In addition, he said, more acres of cotton were harvested this year than in the past four decades.

Farmers had no reason not to succeed:
- Adequate moisture and good temperatures helped crops develop rapidly;
- Modern, early-maturing varieties also speeded growth;
- It was a light insect year; and
- The harvest season also faced no obstacles.

"You don't normally see all this falling together like this," said Burch of the spring-to-fall growing period. "The only trouble now is the prices are down." On Thursday's commodities market, cotton was priced at 56.32 cents per pound, whereas it was 69 or 70 cents a pound a year ago.

Lower prices are due to a predictable agricultural cycle: In recent years, demand for cotton has increased, as have related prices. Hence, more and more farmers entered the picture and the higher production kicked in prices.

Nevertheless, Burch believes cotton farmers in '91 will make more money than they did in '90 because of two facts:
- The average price of the past year's crop will be higher than present cotton prices; and
- Cotton seed for the '91 crop was priced at nearly half what it had been the previous year.

Three-fourths of the state's cotton is grown in the northeastern region, but Acadiana did contribute a small percentage of the crop — about 2,500 acres in Evangeline and St. Landry parishes, which shared a gross farm value of nearly $1 1/2 million in 1990.