Charlie Johnston had been keeping a wary eye on the sky all day. The weather front had promised that a rain moving in would bring much-needed relief from the drought, but when it didn't materialize, Johnston decided it was time to call back his two mechanical cotton pickers from the field. The choice was not an easy one, especially when the rains come in,” said Johnston.

The Johnston farm, the night crew began preparing to take over from weary day-shift workers. There were already dozens of trailers of cotton in the sheds, ready for ginning.

Johnston decided it was time to call back his two mechanical cotton pickers from the field. He then quickly hooked up a 40-foot trailer full of cotton to his pickup truck and drove it over to the gin. The weather forecast had warned that a slow-moving front would bring precipitation to the area.

As rain began to pour down, Johnston and his crew continued to work around the trailer, moving trailers of cotton into the gin as quickly as possible.

Wade Waller sips coffee during a late-night break at the Boeuf Prairie Gin.

At the Boeuf (pronounced BIFF) Prairie Gin, two miles up the road from the Johnston farm, the night crew began preparing to take over from weary day-shift workers. The gin is located in north Louisiana and is run by the weather, said Ray Bryan, gin manager. "If it rains, it's a nightmare. If it's hot, it's a nightmare. If it's cold, it's a nightmare."

"The crop, the ginning season, the weather, the cotton, the gin, all depends on the weather," Bryan said. "The cotton has a lot of time, because the farmers have a lot of time and a lot of space in which to store and protect the cotton." Clark said. "It would also help if the farmers didn't do so much damage to the cotton."

The cotton is compressed into bales weighing approximately 500 pounds. Each bale is tightly bound and is then loaded onto a truck for transportation. The gin produces an average of 15,000 bales of cotton per year. This year, Bryan expects an output of at least 18,000 bales.

The gin operator turns his hands into the flow of the cotton into the gin to check the heat and the texture of the cotton.