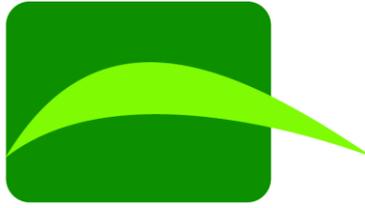


**ARKANSAS
AGRICULTURE
DEPARTMENT**



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ARKANSAS BOLL WEEVIL ERADICATION FOUNDATION MAKES FINAL PAYMENT FOR DEBT

Little Rock, Ark. – The Arkansas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation (ABWEF) has made its final payment on all debt incurred by Arkansas boll weevil eradication efforts, since it began operations in 1997. The remaining balance of approximately \$2 million dollars owed to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) was made three years ahead of the scheduled maturity date. All Arkansas cotton growers are members of this foundation, and have played a part in this debt payment.

In its Board meeting on September 23, 2015, the ABWEF Board approved the final payment. ABWEF conducted Arkansas boll weevil eradication operations in coordination with the USDA and other cotton producing states across the south to rid the cotton industry of the devastating boll weevil pest.

“It is a great day for the cotton producers in Arkansas, both past and present, to see this debt paid in full. Our current board of directors, as well as past directors, are dedicated to the operation of a successful program for our cotton producers. In taking this step to pay off the debt of \$2,059,947.11 three years early, it demonstrates the willingness of our board to follow through with their commitment to operate the best growers’ program possible,” said ABWEF Executive Director Regina Coleman.

“This is a huge milestone for Arkansas. It will save cotton farmers thousands of dollars, and it is to their credit that this program has been successful in Arkansas, and the debt is now paid in full. Arkansas is a leader among cotton producing states in the U.S. and cotton production is essential to our agricultural economy. This is a great day for Arkansas agriculture, especially Arkansas cotton growers” said ASPB Director Darryl Little.

Chairman of the ABWEF Board of the Directors Laudies Brantley would like to extend thanks to those who began the boll weevil program in Arkansas and took the risk of operation - so that cotton industry stakeholders could enjoy the benefits of post-eradication efforts, and a successful cotton industry.

ABWEF began eradication operations in Arkansas in 1997 in southwest Arkansas counties, and made annual expansions that ultimately included all cotton producing areas. After the boll weevil was completely eradicated from Arkansas in 2006, the ABWEF began to downsize and make advance payments on the debt incurred with FSA.

ABWEF borrowed from FSA in order to finance the front end costs incurred to carry out the boll weevil eradication program. The FSA debt and operational costs have been paid for by Arkansas cotton growers through annual assessments on each acre of cotton grown in Arkansas. ABWEF continues a maintenance program that monitors the state for boll weevil presence, which is entirely a prevention effort. No boll weevils have been found in Arkansas since 2006.

ABWEF is an Arkansas nonprofit corporation designated by the Arkansas State Plant Board to operate the Arkansas boll weevil eradication program. ABWEF and the boll weevil eradication operations are overseen and regulated by the Arkansas State Plant Board. The Arkansas State Plant Board implements regulations and administers enforcement for laws that impact agriculture and the general public in the State. The Arkansas State Plant Board is a division of the Arkansas Agriculture Department.

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