

History and Changes in Production and Pest Management in the Old Peanut Belt in North Carolina

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Prior to changes in the 2003 Federal Farm Bill the combined acreage of peanut in Halifax and Northampton counties was 54,430 (1999) constituting 34% of total acreage in North Carolina. In 1999, acreage in these counties was a combined total of 40,955 (33% of acres in North Carolina). In contrast, acreage in these counties in 2010 was 8,071 or 9% of total acres in the state. More recently, the average number of acres from 2015-2017 for the sum of these counties was 11,565 or 10% of total acres in North Carolina. The change in legislation resulted in a shift from peanut to more grain crops, most notably soybean. Although yield of peanut per acre increased after the change in legislation in these counties, most likely as a result of improved rotations and planting on soils more suitable for peanut, less income across farmers was realized because of the decrease in acreage and shift by small and medium-size farmers to crops other than peanut. Although acreage decreased following the change in legislation in 2003, 25% of growers submitting yield information for the 5,000 Pound Peanut Club for the 2017 season (growers producing an average yield of 5,000 lbs/acre on all acres of production) were from Halifax and Northampton counties. Farmers in these counties have adopted conservation tillage practices for peanut and other crops more rapidly than farmers in many other counties in the state.