

November 23, 2021

To Cotton Industry Stakeholders:

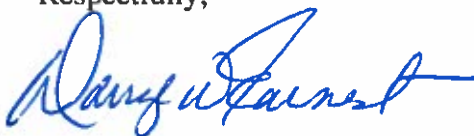
I want to take this opportunity to provide some updates regarding our cotton classing services, especially the timeliness to complete the classing process and disseminate final data records. In our Program, we strive to stay within 72 hours from the time the samples arrive at our facilities to the finished classing records. Over the past several years, we have delivered services at or well below that target timeframe. However, from the onset of this classing season, we have experienced challenges that have adversely affected our ability to meet that target. One of the major challenges encountered has been acquiring and retaining the seasonal labor needed to operate all ten of our regional classing offices on a multi-shift basis. Each year, we employ approximately 1,500 to 2,500 seasonal employees across our locations. With the current conditions in the job market, our ability to secure these numbers has been negatively impacted. We have implemented a variety of ways to solicit and retain new employees including pay increases, incentives, and shift flexibility but unfortunately, our numbers are below what is needed in many locations.

Another setback to our timeliness of service has been delays associated with servicing equipment and getting replacement parts and materials delivered. The labor shortage has impacted many service providers including those companies that typically service our equipment and systems. The supply chain dilemmas that are apparent nationwide are also affecting us and our service providers' ability to get necessary materials and parts in a timely fashion. We continue to search for alternate sources for these services and materials, but the delays appear to be more systemic than isolated.

The impacts of these challenges have caused some of our offices to fall outside our target of 72-hour turnaround. We are aware of this and how important it is for our customers to receive their classing data in a timely fashion, especially given the current market conditions. I want to apologize for these delays and assure all our stakeholders that we are taking extraordinary measures to use all resources available to us and doing our best to stay as current with the sample receipts as possible. We ask for your patience and understanding as we navigate through these uncharted waters with many others. We will continue to keep our customers and stakeholders apprised of our operational status and any new occurrences as we move through the remainder of the season.

Thank you all for your patience and continued trust in our Program and its services. I encourage you to contact the Area Director in your regional cotton classing facility if you have questions or need more information.

Respectfully,



Darryl W. Earnest
Deputy Administrator