



Now, the spring tooth header reel on the front of each combine gobbles up the two windrows. As the plants disappear into the maw of the machine, the decibel count mounts as the pods are separated from the plants. The peanuts are carried into a 2-ton-capacity basket on the combine, while the stalks and leaves are spit out of the back of the combine.

“After we shut down combining at the end of the day, we rake up the peanut trash and bale it to feed to our cattle,” Strickland says.

When the combine baskets are full, they dump into specially designed drying wagons that will hold from 4.25 to 7.5 tons of in-shell peanuts, depending on the variety and grade. The wagons are taken directly to the sheller, where drying hoses are attached and heat is applied to further dry down the peanuts.

The Stricklands also grow 800-plus acres of cotton, 550 acres of winter wheat and 150 acres of grain sorghum. In addition, they have 300 Angus-cross and Charolais cows and grow out 600-pound feeder calves.

But Strickland prefers to call himself a peanut farmer. “We plant just enough cotton to rotate



After digging, peanuts are left on top of the ground to dry for a few days (insets) before the combine gobbles them up (top).

with peanuts,” he says. Peanuts, he explains, are highly susceptible to a variety of root, stem and leaf diseases, as well as nematodes. Rotation with a non-susceptible crop helps reduce disease problems and makes chemical control more effective.

“Also, peanuts seem to make us more money than cotton most years,” Strickland adds.

Prices can be unpredictable, he concedes. In 2008, he had contracts for \$500 to \$525 per ton with Golden Peanut Company of Alpharetta, Georgia, one of the largest shellers and processors of peanuts in the country.

But the combination of oversupply and the bad publicity from the salmonella outbreak in a Georgia peanut butter plant broke the price. In 2009, a year