

Tobacco: It pays to mechanize



IN THE FIELD: This harvester has a large holding capacity for storing cropped tobacco until it can be unloaded.



PASSING THE BUCKS: The Boyettes' harvester unloads its valuable gold-leaf cargo onto a converted school bus.



DOUBLE CHECK: A worker watches to make sure the transfer of the tobacco from the converted school bus to the box loading system goes smoothly. Note the paddle system for spreading the tobacco.



IRON MUSCLE: A forklift efficiently moves a box of tobacco into the curing barn, even as another is being filled.



END OF THE LINE: The tobacco comes over the top of the loader and is distributed into boxes. Workers are waiting to push rods in and pull the box over on rollers.

By RICHARD DAVIS

SINCE the contracting of tobacco has come about, many flue-cured tobacco growers have consolidated their operations, growing more tobacco in the process. They've tried to become as efficient as possible, often turning to greater mechanization.

More and more growers are going to the latest in harvesting, curing and baling equipment. In Wilson County, N.C., the Boyette family decided to go ahead and make the "jump." They recently purchased and installed a Precision Leaf Loader system from Granville Equipment.

Brothers Donnie and Brent Boyette say the leaf loader is designed to help them increase the amount of tobacco they can harvest with the same number of workers — or perhaps fewer.

"We can put in a barn of tobacco in an hour," Donnie says. "Before, it took maybe two or two and a half hours. We can do that with the same number of hands and do a better job of getting the tobacco into the box. As a result, we've increased our acres this year. Now we can use the same number of workers to top and sucker in the morning and then still put in the same amount of tobacco in just the afternoon that it used to take all day to do."

The automated system has already helped the Boyettes grow their operation. This year they grew 177 acres of tobacco. Last year they grew 140 acres.

"Next year we're thinking about increasing again," Donnie says. "I'm shooting for 200 acres because with this system we could easily handle that much. That is about as big as we would want to get."

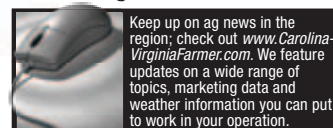


MAKING USE OF GRAVITY: Brent Boyette checks the scale that automatically weighs every box for uniformity.

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