



Additional management in the field and curing barn is needed for good leaf quality for both crops in double-crop curing systems.

Smoke out curing costs

Reduce barn-curing expenses with dark-fired double crop
By Andy Bailey and Bill Pitt

Cutting production costs has been a major topic of discussion for growers in the post-tobacco program era. Although growers no longer pay quota costs, production costs for many inputs have increased in the past two years, while leaf prices are less than they were in 2004.

Some dark-tobacco production contracts have strict limitations on the number of sticks that can be housed in a barn. Barn capacity restrictions, which set guidelines on stick spacing, will without question make curing easier, increase cured-leaf quality and increase cured-leaf yield by reducing the risks of sweating and houseburn. However, some growers may no longer have the barn capacity to cure the same amount of tobacco that they did just a few years ago.

14 TOBACCO TRENDS

Although conventional curing practices for dark-fired tobacco use a curing barn for only one cure per year, many growers have doubled their curing capacity by curing two crops in the same barn and year. Double-crop curing allows several advantages for those who can efficiently use the system, including:

- reduced cost of barn construction, maintenance, insurance and interest
- easier to keep labor force occupied prior to stripping
- possible consolidation of curing facilities to reduce costs of relocating labor, equipment and transportation of both green and cured tobacco
- earlier delivery of tobacco since many buying companies are now receiving earlier to allow for those using double-cropping systems.

FIELD MANAGEMENT

The major consideration for double-crop curing is the increased management required. Double-crop systems require staggered transplanting dates, where the

first crop should be set in early May and the second crop set five to six weeks later finishing by mid-June.

With this time difference in setting, the two crops must be managed separately for the entire growing season. This means separate applications of nitrogen fertilization — both preplant and side-dressing — and separate weed, insect and disease control applications, topping, and sucker control.

Two distinctly different crops also require more scouting and recordkeeping to monitor the progress and condition of both crops throughout the season. Earlier setting also means the labor force needs to arrive sooner, the field must be prepared sooner, and plants must be ready sooner.

Yields for either crop can be 200 to 300 pounds-per-acre lower than yield for a single conventional crop, since neither crop is set in the “ideal” time frame of late May to early June. Early crops may suffer from more disease pressure — particular-

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