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ly black root rot — while late crops may receive more insect pressure, be more likely to encounter drought stress and not mature as quickly as earlier crops.

Variety selection is extremely important in a double-crop system. Varieties with black root rot resistance, such as KY 171 or TN D950, are recommended for the early crop, since black root rot is more common when setting into cool, wet soils.

Medium- to late-maturing varieties are recommended for the late crop so it can stay in the field longer if harvest or curing of the first crop is delayed. Varieties that cure well, such as Narrowleaf Madole LC, are recommended for later crops since the second crop is usually cured under somewhat adverse conditions with cooler temperatures.

Be aware that none of the Madole varieties have any resistance to any disease and should not be grown in fields where diseases such as black shank are known to exist.

Although weather effects have the greatest influence on the time of setting and harvest, the two crops must be

managed on a timetable. The quality of both crops can be reduced if weather or other factors delay the setting or harvest of the first crop.

CURING MANAGEMENT

The most critical time in double-cropping is during the curing and firing of the first crop. The setting-time difference of five weeks or so is also the target time period for curing the first crop. Since this is less time than typically used for curing a standard crop, the first cure must be fired fairly aggressively. This usually means starting the first fire a bit earlier after housing than normal and firing almost continuously instead of allowing time for the tobacco to come in order between firings.

KY 171 yellows and cures easily, while TN D950 matures quickly in the field and requires more patience and management during the coloring process. After the color is set, fires should be kept as warm as the buyer allows.

In the second cure, more time can be used for curing, and more time also may be required due to adverse curing conditions that are typical at that time of year.

Color set may be difficult for the second crop due to cooler temperatures. Even good curing varieties may yellow more slowly and are easily blued — similar to scorching — if fires are started too early and burn too hot. Low relative humidity that usually comes with cooler temperatures can allow the tobacco to dry too quickly, setting more green color in the cured leaf.

Getting enough finish on the leaf can be more difficult with both cures. Although the humidity is generally higher in the first cure, the continuous firing needed may dry the tobacco more, so it takes less finish.

Problems with finishing are more common in the second cure, where cooler temperatures and lower humidity may make the tobacco drier for a longer period of time.

To increase moisture levels in the barn, water may need to be added to the sawdust to produce a moist smoke. Under extremely dry conditions, water also may be added in moderation to the tails of the tobacco on the lower tier, or through overhead misting systems in the top of the barn.

TAKEDOWN

In double-crop systems, getting moisture into the crop to allow takedown will almost surely have to be done mechanically, as time constraints and/or weather conditions seldom allow a “natural sea-

son” to bring the tobacco in order. Using steamers, overhead misting systems or both are acceptable means of bringing tobacco in order.

Use of an overhead misting system may be preferred since it usually takes less total water than a steamer does to bring tobacco in order.

When a steamer is used on fully cured and finished dark-fired tobacco, several steamings may be needed to precondition the leaf and stabilize the moisture content. The initial steaming may seem to bring tobacco in order, but moisture quickly evaporates, leaving the tobacco too dry for stripping.

With steaming or overhead misting, be careful not to apply too much water to the tobacco and don't take it down in too high order.

With overhead misting, stop misting as soon as water droplets begin to fall from the lower tier. Misting for too long at one time brings too much order to the tobacco and washes off finish. It is much better to mist several times for shorter periods.

HANDLING FIRST CURE

Since labor forces are needed to harvest the second crop as soon as the first cure is complete, it usually is not possible to strip the entire first cure at one time. Where to store the remainder of the first cure until stripping may pose the biggest problem for many growers.

Most likely, stalks of the first cure will still have some moisture, so unstripped tobacco bulked down in piles could begin to rot before it is stripped.

If the tobacco will be stripped soon after takedown, bulking it down with higher leaf moisture onto flatbed wagons is acceptable.

If tobacco will not be stripped immediately, taking down with lower leaf moisture onto scaffold wagons is recommended. However, this requires more storage space for scaffold wagons loaded with cured tobacco and limits the availability of scaffold wagons for harvesting the second crop. Whichever handling method is used, the goal should be to deliver the crop to the buyer as quickly as possible.

Double-crop curing can be a useful cost-cutting tool for many dark-fired tobacco producers, but its success depends on the management, labor, equipment and efficiency of the individual grower. Before making the decision to use double-crop systems, growers should evaluate their barns, labor and equipment, and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of this system as it relates to their operation.



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